

ZEBEDEE V.



EDITH BARNARD DELANO



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ZEBEDEE V.



“She come right along askin’ for him”

FRONTISPIECE

✓ ZEBEDEE V.

BY
EDITH BARNARD DELANO

ILLUSTRATED ✓



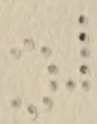
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I

Pocahontas, the name of a locality rather than a village, recalls to those who knew it a country store beside a railroad platform; a long line of hitching-posts near an untidy blacksmith shop, where towards train-time various buggies, Dayton wagons, and farm teams were tied; and an irregular open space stretching from the hitching-rail to the store. A dusty road of many hollows and hidden lumps led down the hill to the store and crossed the narrow-gauge railway. A raised platform served as railroad station, and was apt to be littered with milk-

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cans, and boxes of various age and size, and all the nondescript driftwood which washes upon the shores of a farming community. In summer there was always, after sunset, a row of men seated along its edge, with heels dangling over the dusty weeds that sprang up under its protection. In winter the loungers gathered within the store, which served equally well as post-office, ticket-office, and news exchange. Its front wore the comprehensive sign:

“SHOES, GROCERIES, SEED & NOTIONS”

The open space, with the store and the railroad and the hitching-rail and blacksmith shop, was the center of Pocahontas; what there was of a village stretched along the pike for half a mile, and straggled up the cross-road over the river and hill to the north. The shallow, rippling,

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rock-broken stream would not have been called a river at all in a more liberally watered country — nor in one more literal. Not far from the point at which the river was spanned by a covered bridge — something of a rarity in Maryland — stood a long-disused, gaunt-looking, gray-stone building of many sightless windows, a silent reminder of the small cotton-duck industry that once gave life to the place. Along the steeply ascending road, beyond the mill, were several rows of closely built stone cottages. The hill was at one time crowned with a small, unpretentious wooden church whose simple exterior and low, pointed steeple were unadorned save by a coat of light brown paint. Between the church and the toll-gate perhaps twenty houses faced the road, — wooden houses, none of them very lately painted, none of them especially tidy, but all with

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a homely, comfortable, hospitable look about them, and the indescribable signs of genial family life — perhaps a child's wagon in a front walk, or a chicken or two investigating the kitchen door, a hound or setter dozing in a sunny spot, a row of little stockings on a line in the backyard, or a group of rockers under a cherry tree or on the veranda. There was only one remarkable thing about them; in front of every house ran a line of fence, and two-thirds of the fences were of iron. Of wooden fences there were many varieties, of many degrees of dilapidation; there were two low and uneven stone walls which were evidently allowed to take care of themselves; but of the iron fences there was a very riotousness of color, pattern, and size. There were simple lines of iron with unadorned uprights, there were fences of large-

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meshed, close-meshed, and fancy-meshed nettings; some had designs twisted in the uprights, others had rods and spikes of different heights; there was one, in front of a large house which stood pharisaical in rather new white paint, sufficiently tall and ornate to grace the entrance to a baronial estate. It was an unusual display of the iron-founder's art, — an almost marvelous display, unless one remembered the persuasiveness of Mr. Zebedee V. Slocum.

Of the people of Pocahontas, about one-third were Slocums, one-third were Poseys, and the other third did not really count. There were three Elmer Poseys and four Zebedee Slocums; to avoid confusion the neighborhood gave each one a distinctive title, as: "Ol' Zeb," "Crick Zeb," — to the man who lived over by Pone Creek, "Little Zeb," and "Zebedee

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V.” All the Pocahontas men had points of similarity beyond their names. All were farmers, and most were married men with promising families. They all attended the Methodist church on the hill, and all were staunch Democrats, like their fathers before them. If tomatoes brought good prices one year, the next year they all raised tomatoes. If a man in Anne Arundel made a fortune in cabbages when cabbages were scarce, the fields around Pocahontas were blue with them the next summer. They had Rural Free Delivery, and all took the Baltimore “Sun Paper” and Never Fail Pain Killer. Their days passed in the pleasant round of the seasons, yet not uneventfully; life never became monotonous; they had Zebedee V. among them!

For while Mr. Zebedee V. Slocum, like the lilies of the field, neither toiled nor

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spun, he was richly endowed with a vivid and wandering imagination, and with powers of persuasion worthy of a wider field. Pocahontas was indebted to him not only for its iron fences; every house in the village had its lightning rod, every house had also an electric bell. Most of those boasting iron fences had Venetian blinds, and nearly all had corrugated-iron roofs on their hen houses. Every good housewife in the place was supplied with a patent self-basting roasting pan, and many had wonderful needle-books of a thousand assorted needles with patent eyes. The owners of these wonders would have been most unwilling to dispense with any of them, yet none would have bought them in the first place had it not been for the persuasiveness of Mr. Slocum.

Zebedee V. was a born leader of men, and not by inclination anything else. His

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oratory poured forth convincingly on any subject; the romantic turn of his mind opened for his staid and stolid neighbors entrancing vistas of the imagination which would have remained closed but for him. His presence among them brought into their lives the beguiling element of uncertainty, the will-of-the-wisp of chance, the charm of the unexpected. All the men admired him; some, like his friend Mr. Willy Posey, the Rural Delivery letter-carrier, would have followed him to the death; it was only the women who distrusted him. His was the most striking figure among them, and never a day passed that he was not a subject of conversation. His children, his private affairs, his political views, and his business enterprises were alike of absorbing interest; but it was when he had buried his second wife, and was once more on the

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matrimonial market of Pocahontas, that Mr. Slocum took the place that was preëminently his, the first place in the thoughts and conversation of his neighbors.

II

The hot sun of an August afternoon was pouring down upon the fields and hills around Pocahontas. The roads, which were inches deep with red clay in the spring, and whose frozen ruts were many and dangerous in the winter, were now heavy with yellow dust. The roadsides and bordering vegetation were thickly covered with it, and a rattling Dayton wagon, moving slowly along the pike, raised a yellow cloud.

The Dayton belonged to Mrs. Aaron Posey, who was returning from the funeral of Mr. Zebedee V. Slocum's second wife; with her were her two sisters — Mrs. "Sissy" Slocum and Miss Julia

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Higgins — and Mrs. Slocum's guest, Mrs. Stansbury. Mrs. Posey had been intending to take Mrs. Stansbury "to ride," and the funeral afforded a good opportunity to combine duty with pleasure. The conversation of the four was of the departed Mrs. Slocum.

"Well," said Mrs. Posey, "it's to be hoped 't Zebedee V. Slocum 'll pay more respect to pore Milly's mem'ry 'n he did to Lucy White's."

"Oh, well now, Annie Lee," said her widowed sister, "Zebedee V. had them eight child'en to look after, an' a body cain't blame a man with eight child'en for takin' a helpmate's soon's he can get one."

"I don't care," said Mrs. Aaron, "there's sech a thing's decency, eight child'en or not."

"For the land's sakes!" exclaimed Mrs.

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Stansbury. "Did they all eight belong to the first wife?"

"Every last one of 'em," replied Mrs. Aaron, her tone almost suggesting a personal injury. "Zebedee V. Slocum married Lucy White for her wealth and expectations, and I reckon she brought him less of one and more of the other 'n ever he counted on. It did n't take him long to make an end of the money."

"I wonder she let him have control of it," said Mrs. Stansbury, in the firm tone of a "born manager." "What 'd he do with all them child'en?"

"Do? He did n't do one single thing but put 'em all eight out visitin'. That 's what he did. He stood 'em two days after Lucy White 's laid away, an' nen he put 'em all into the wagon with their clo'es, what they was of 'em, and took 'em around to visit. I thank my stars I was away

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from home that day. Ef it had n't been for old Mis' Lewis Cary's dyin' so sudden at the last I would n't 'a' been, either!"

"Was they comin' to visit you?" asked Mrs. Stansbury.

"Well, I reckon Zebedee V. Slocum knew 's well 's anybody else 't I have five feather beds and set a good table. Zebedee V. Slocum always knows where to look for the butter for *his* bread. I on'y say 't I thank my stars I was n't home when that man drove around puttin' his child'en to visit."

"Where 'd he put them?" asked Mrs. Stansbury.

"Jest wherever he could," said Mrs. Posey, emphatically.

"Yes, that he did," said Mrs. Slocum. "He come to my house whilst I was a makin' currant jelly. Everybody knows currant's the hardest kind to jell, and

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everybody but a man 'd 'a' kept out of the way; and I do think 't any man on earth but Zebedee V. Slocum 'd 'a' gone away again when he see my trouble and worry. But not him. I never 's so surprised in all my life 's when I see him drivin' into the side yard with his eight. He picked Thomasina and Gladys Virginia out of the wagon, and a little bundle of clo'es, and set 'em down in my kitchen. I 's just that dumfounded I could n't say one word, and the jelly jest a-comin'! But Zebedee V. said enough to fit the occasion. He 's lookin' as solemn as a judge, and every inch the widower. 'Cousin Sissy,' s'ys he, 'you 're the widder o' my own first cousin,' s'ys he, 'and I feel 't you got as good a right as any to be the comforter of my poor motherless half-orphans. I thought you 'd like to have these here little ones to make you a visit.' And with that

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he up and walks out, and leaves 'em settin' there with never a blink. It did seem like he might 'a' took 'em home after a month or so, but he did n't. Fin'lly the neighbors met and decided to jest return 'em, which they did. Mis' Julius Todd drove around and collected 'em, and left 'em at Zebedee V.'s house 'ithout a word. He stood 'em jest one week, an' nen he eloped with Milly Skinner."

"She from Pocahontas?" asked Mrs. Stansbury.

"Um hum," said Mrs. Aaron Posey. "She was in high reputè as a worker, and Zebedee V. Slocum thought she 'd oughter be able to raise up his eight. Milly was n't goin' to bother herself with other folks's children, howsoever, and it seemed like she 's been workin' so hard all her life 't she wanted to rest. Anyways, that 's all she did, after she 's married; and it

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was n't more 'n two year before she's so fleshy she could n't scarcely move outen her chair. And here Tuesday she dropped dead!"

"For the land's sakes!" said Mrs. Stansbury. "What 'll the child'en do for mournin'?"

"Well," said Mrs. Posey, "it's a blessed good thing the style's come in of wearin' black on the arm. Zebedora and Florence's got tan coats as good as new. Most anybody can give 'em enough black goods for strips, an' Zebedora's old enough to look after 'em all. She's done that long enough a'ready, goodness knows, — pore child!"

The Dayton had rattled in at Mrs. Posey's gate, and that lady helped her guests to alight.

III

The Aaron Posey farm was some four miles out the pike from the church on the hill. Aaron Posey was a kindly, self-effacing soul with a masterful wife, whose grievance it was that she lived just far enough from Pocahontas to be one of the last to hear any news. There were no children at the Aaron Poseys', but Mrs. Aaron mothered her husband, and Mr. Posey raised little white pigs which he sold for high prices, and very large white pigs which took all the prizes at the county fairs of Belair and Timonium and Hagerstown. Mrs. Posey was not to be outdone by Aaron; she was noted for making the best beaten biscuit and peach marmalade and cherry bounce in Pocahontas; and

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it is something to be supreme in one's own sphere, however circumscribed it may be.

Aaron's cousin Willy — Mr. Willy, he was generally called, perhaps out of deference to some innate dignity — was the Rural Delivery letter-carrier, and it describes his character to say that his two dearest friends were Zebedee V. Slocum and his cousin Aaron's wife, the embodiments of romance and of common sense. The greatest joys of his life were to listen to Zebedee V. and talk to Mrs. Aaron. He was a plump, rosy-cheeked little man, with a round face that was smooth-shaven on Wednesdays and Sundays. His movements were quick and rather fussy. His point of view wavered between an inclination towards prudishness and a zest for the unusual. He was painfully shy with most women, and would have given a year of his life to be known

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as a beau for one short day. He kept his own house far more neatly than did many of his feminine neighbors, and had never found his bachelor existence lonely or irksome.

The Aaron Posey farm was the last stopping-place on his route, and he would rattle up to the side porch in his old Dayton wagon, hop over the wheel, and fussily tie his sedate white mare, Alexander, as securely as if she had been a two-year-old thoroughbred, and then trip up to the veranda or into the sitting-room, bristling with all the latest news of Pocahontas.

A month or two after the funeral of the second Mrs. Zebedee V., he said to Mrs. Aaron one afternoon,

“I tell you what it is, Cousin Annie Lee, I ain’t got much respec’ for anybody ’t pays taxes towards Rural Delivery and

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nen goes to the store for his mail. That 's what I call sheer wastefulness."

Mrs. Posey was sprinkling down the clothes, and looked up at him over the black rims of her spectacles. "What 's in that to make you so riled, Cousin Willy?" she asked.

"Well, I jest tell you what 't is, Cousin Annie Lee; I ain't got a minute to spare to read any postmarks, nor postals neither, and I never was one of the kind to peer into other folks's business. People cert'n'y is suspicious in this world. Here only the other day I took a letter to Zebedee V. Slocum from Plumtree, Indiana, and said somethin' pleasant like about it havin' come far enough to get tired, and Zebedee V. looked like he thought I 's wantin' to know what 's inside of it; and now he goes to the store every day himself. Yes 'm."

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Mrs. Aaron Posey looked interested; she asked the postman to be seated, took off her spectacles, and made herself comfortable in her favorite rocker.

“Well! I declare!” she said. “Now what do you s’ppose he’s gettin’ letters from there for? Where’d you say it was?”

“Plumtree, Indiana,” replied Mr. Willy. “Little Hanse Brown’s clerkin’ at the store now, and he says Zebedee V. gets a letter from there every two or three times a week.”

Mrs. Aaron and Mr. Willy looked at each other intently for a minute. Then Mrs. Aaron said:

“I’d jest like to know what Zebedee V. Slocum’s up to now.”

“Yes’m,” said Mr. Willy, “I reckon it’s somethin’ out o’ the common.”

He had no explanation to offer, how-

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ever, and it was not until several weeks later that he brought further news with the mail. As he hopped from his wagon he called out his usual cheery greeting.

“Why, good evenin’, Cousin Annie Lee. Nice ba’m day, ain’t it?”

“I never pay much ’tention to the weather,” replied Mrs. Posey. “Weather’s bound to happen anyways, and I never could see ’t forecastin’ it and prayin’ for it does a mite o’ good, exceptin’ to them as makes a livin’ by so doin’.”

“Well ’m, maybe that’s so. But it cert’n’y is gettin’ real springy.”

“Spring gen’lly follers winter,” affirmed Mrs. Aaron. “I prefer the fall o’ the year, myself, though that’s a matter of choice.”

“Yes, ma’am, that it is, and they’s

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right smart of folks like the spring best. I'm kinder partial to it myself. Kinder sorter makes you feel like movin' and keepin' still all at oncet. Zebedee V. says springtime's made for buildin' nests and lovin' — 'In the spring a young man's fancy begins to think of makin' love' — or somethin' like that."

Mrs. Posey sat up straight in her chair. "You don't mean to tell me," she said, "that Zebedee V. Slocum's thinkin' of gettin' married again this quick?"

"Mr. Willy smiled, and rubbed his chin. "Looks that-a-way," he said.

"So that's what all those letters are for up to — what's the name of the place?"

"Plumtree, Indiana. Yes'm."

"Now who on earth does Zebedee V. Slocum know out there?"

"Well'm, he's tellin' us about her last

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night at the store. A package come 't he thought must be her pixture, but it was jest some souvenir postals with views on 'em. She wrote 't she was too bashful to set for her pixture, and she 'd ruther wait anyhow till he sees her, so 's he won't form any wrong impression. Yes 'm. Zebedee V. says that 's the kind for him. Says he married for wealth oncet and a worker oncet, and now he wants to wed a true woman, timid and gentle, 'at wants a manly champion to stand between her and the world, the kind 'at needs love and pertection to flourish like a flower."

Mrs. Posey remarked: "That sounds like Zebedee V. Slocum. D's he expect to find all of that?"

"Yes 'm, so he says. That 's the kind he mentioned in his advertisement."

"Cousin Willy! You don't mean to

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tell me 't that man actshally advertised for a wife? ”

“ Yes 'm. Little Hanse says he reckons ef many people he'abouts did that, 't this post-office 'd soon raise out of the fo'th-class list. I noticed Zebedee V. 's hangin' aroun' the store right smart, but I never suspicioned he 's gettin' his own letters, not tell jest when I told you about it. I jest thought he 's lonesome like, without pore Milly, an' seekin' company. Yes 'm.”

“ Well, I must say I think that's a disgrace to the community. To advertise for a wife, with plenty of unmarried ladies right here in Pocahontas! Not that any one of 'em would have Zebedee V. Slocum, not ef he's to ask 'em on bended knee. But to advertise in the papers! ”

“ Yes 'm,” said the postman, “ that's a right expensive way, it cert'n'y is. I

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reckon it was n't what you might call a real necessity, things bein' as they are."

"Hum," said Mrs. Aaron; then, "Did he say much about her, Cousin Willy?" she asked.

"He says she used to teach school, and late years she's been nursin' a aged relative till he died."

"I reckon the aged relative left her well off, or Zebedee V. Slocum'd never be makin' up to her."

"Well'm, he says he wants to marry his ideal woman oncet in his life, and he cain't find her he'abouts."

Mrs. Posey sniffed. "Zebedee V. Slocum's ideals are mighty apt to have silver linin's," she said, as she closed the door after Mr. Willy.

IV

The most interesting news of all was brought by the carrier one afternoon in early midsummer.

“Why, good evenin’, Cousin Annie Lee,” he called out as he was tying his horse. “You’d jest oughter been to the store day befo’ yest’day. I tell you what, that’s the greatest thing I ever see.” He sat down and began fanning and rocking. Mrs. Aaron Posey waited a few seconds, then said impatiently:

“What happened?”

“Well ’m,” said Mr. Willy, with a reminiscent chuckle, “you’d oughter been there, that’s all. You know ’m, we all went down to see Zebedee V. off, ’cause he was goin’ to Balt’mer to meet his bride

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from Plumtree, Indiana. They was to get married in Balt'mer an' nen come on home. Zebedee V., he got kinder warmed up by the occasion, and talked right smart about her. Said her name was Flora, and that she cert'n'y must be mighty fond of a man to come all that way to meet him. Said he could jest pixture her in his mind's eye, gettin' into a big city like Balt'mer all tired out and skeered, and a wonderin' whether he 'd meet her or not. Said sometimes his heart misgave him for uprootin' sech a tender flower and transplantin' her into a strange neighborhood. He said he reckoned it would n't be a safe thing for everybody to do, but it was jest in such cases that experience tells, and he'd oughter be able to manage any woman, livin' or dead. Unc' Lewis Cary up and ast him if he 'd told her he's married twicet befo'; and he said natchelly,

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that he was n't the man to deceive a young and trustin' female. Cousin Julius Todd wanted to know what she said to eight child'en, and Zebedee V. said he reckoned she did n't rightly take in they's *eight* of 'em. He said he mentioned his motherless little ones, and she said she guessed she could stand 'em. Zebedee V. said he reckoned she was n't much bigger 'n his eldest, and they'd all be like playful child'en together. Well 'm, whilst he's showin' us the marriage license and talkin' about matrimony bein' the gate to heaven, a whistle blowed. We all thought it was the down train; so we went out onto the platform with Zebedee V. But it was n't his train; it was the train from Balt'mer. And who do you think got off? "

"Flora," said Mrs. Posey.

"Yes 'm, that's jest exactly who 'did.

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But they was n't ary one of us guessed it first sight. No indeedy! They was n't even a warnin' flutter inside o' Zebedee V.!" Mr. Willy smiled reminiscently. He paused and rocked, smacking the palms of his hands on the arms of the chair, and chuckling in a way no woman could be expected to endure.

"For the land's sakes, go on," exclaimed Mrs. Posey, impatiently. "What 'd she look like? What 'd she have on?"

"Well 'm, Zebedee V.'s anticipations had n't pixtured her very correctly. She looks like she's some oldern 'n he is, and she's consider'ble taller. I reckon handsome is as handsome does; but her hair is jest about the color of a clay road in the springtime, and she's got a kinder impediment in one of her eyes. It jest stands still like, when it rests on you; and

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it gives you a mighty oneasy feelin', I can tell you! Makes you feel like turnin' round real quick to find out what she's lookin' at behind yo' head. They ain't nothin' slow nor easy-goin' about Flora, as I could see; but she looks like she might be real kind when she ain't crossed. I reckon she gen'lly has her own way."

"What 'd she do?" asked Mrs. Aaron.

"Well 'm," said Mr. Willy, "maybe you won't believe it, but what I'm tellin' is a fact. Jest as soon as ever her foot lit on the platform of Pocahontas, a breeze sprung up! Yes, ma'am, that's what it did! And from then on things went right lively for an hour. It took the conductor and the brakeman both to help her off with her belongings; she had two baskets and two valises and a telescope, and a hat box and some little bundles, all in the car with her, not to mention a poll-parrot in a cage;

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and she had two trunks in the baggage car. She got 'em all piled up on the platform, and in less time 'n you could wink at she 's comin' a-huntin' for Zebedee V. Slocum. Z. V. cert'n'y did miss his guess about her; Flora ain't of a retirin' disposition. She come right along askin' for him." Mr. Willy paused for breath and effect.

"Served him right," said Mrs. Aaron.

"Yes 'm. Well 'm, 'pon my soul and body, I could n't tell what happened first. She found Zebedee V., and she found the license, and she found the minister, and she married Zebedee V. right then and there. I don't remember hearin' him say one solitary word, but I reckon he must 'a' spoke durin' the ceremony; 'cause she married him all right. Trust Flora to see to that! She had her things piled in my Dayton, and me a-drivin' her and Zebe-

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dee V. off home, 'fore I as much as come to."

"Oh, you drove 'em home, did you?" asked Mrs. Posey, leaning forward in her chair, her eyes sparkling with enjoyment.

"Yes 'm, that I did," said the postman, "though how I come to do it is more 'n I can tell you. First thing I knew there we were, me and the trunks and the poll-parrot on the front seat, and her and Zebedee V. settin' up behind. When we got to the place, there was all the eight lined up inside the fence, lookin' out over the spikes. It made a good deal of an effect, I can tell you! Course Flora could n't know that 's jest the way they mostly spend their time. It made you think of a regiment or a lodge drawn up at a funeral or somethin'! Oh, it looked great, it did! All 's needed was a flag and a drum!"

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“What ’d she say?” asked Mrs. Posey.

“She looked at ’em real hard, an’ nen she said to Zebedee V., ‘Are all o’ them yours?’ says she. Zebedee V., he says, ‘Yes, my love, them ’s mine and yours.’ An’ nen she got down; and I must say she spoke right nice to the child’en. Zebedora seemed to take to her right off. I reckon she ’ll do right by ’em. Anyways they could n’t be much worse off ’n they have been!

“I ’s startin’ to help Jeromy Fount-le-Roy inside with the trunks when she up and thanks me, and says she would n’t trouble me further, as ’t was her husband’s place to carry in the trunks. Zebedee V. begun to say somethin’, but I noticed her eye was n’t roamin’ none jest then, and so Zebedee V. took a holt o’ one handle and Jeromy took a holt o’ the other. But Mis’ Slocum, she said, ‘You put that down,

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Jeromy. Yo' Pa 's jest give you to me, and I ain't a-goin' to let no child o' mine handle trunks whilst he 's still a-growin'. That ain't too heavy for yo' Pa.' Yes 'm. That 's what she said. When I drove off, Zebedee V.'s a-totin' her things into the house, and her and the child'en 's watchin' him. Them child'en cert'n'y did look s'prised like. Yes 'm."

"Well," said Mrs. Aaron, with a deep breath, "ef that don't beat all I ever heard! I never expected to live to see the day that Zebedee V. Slocum did any real work. Have you heard of him sence?"

"Have I?" quoted Mr. Willy. "Well 'm, I jest reckon I have! First thing yest'day mornin' I drove by his place, and there 's Zebedee V. in the back yard sawin' wood, with the child'en jest standin' off at a distance lookin' on, and that poll-parrot hangin' out on the side

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po'ch passing remarks. Then when I's takin' around the mail I see him clearin' up the yard, and the grass was all cut. Don't look like the same place, exceptin' for the fence and the house.

“Last night I's jest startin' from the store, and Zebedee V. come off 'n the church steps to meet me. I ast him why he did n't come on in to the store, and he said he did n't feel much like joinin' in comp'ny that night. He give me a quarter, and ast me to get him a pipe and some terbacco, on the quiet like. Said he had n't had a smoke all day, and he thought he 'd shorely die befo' mornin' ef he did n't get some smoke in his lungs right soon. So I went back and bought him a pipe and some terbacco, an' nen we set on the church steps quite a while. The smokin' seemed to cheer him up right smart, and he told me all about his first two wives,

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how good they was, and easy-goin'; and he said he knew it was n't right to wish people back in their misery, but he cert'n'y had loved them two. Long about ten o'clock we begun to go towards his house, and he said Flora told him they's two things she'd always made up her mind her husband, if she got one, should n't do, and one was to smoke or chew, and the other was to stay out late. Zebedee V. said he reckoned he might as well humor her about the smokin', and it made him sick to chew, anyhow; but as for stayin' out late, he'd have to use his own judgment. Said they's always some things a man has to decide for himself, anyways, and the way to make a woman understan' that was jest to go ahead and do 'em."

"And him twice a widower!" Mrs. Aaron remarked.

"Yes 'm," Mr. Willy acknowledged.

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“ Well ’m, he ’s goin’ on tellin’ me how to manage a woman, when to give in and when to stand fast and firm, when we come to his place and started aroun’ to the side po’ch. First thing we turned the corner we both stood right stock still. Yes ’m. That ’s what we did! They ’s somethin’ white up on the po’ch, clost alongside o’ the door. I jest whispered to him, ‘ Laws,’ I says, ‘ she ’s waitin’ for you, Z. V.,’ I says, and I started to get outen the way; but he grabbed a holt o’ my arm. ‘ Wait a minute,’ s’ys he, ‘ they ain’t ’ny hurry.’ I says, ‘ Z. V., ef I was you I ’d never go roun’ to that side po’ch. Ain’t they any other way you can get in?’ So he crep’ up to the front door and tried it, but it ’s locked tight. Then he tried eve’y shutter on the front of the house and down the side, and I went along to keep him comp’ny. But they ’s all shet tight,

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too. They was n't anything else to do but to take the side po'ch, so we crep' aroun' the corner again. She had n't budged; and I says, 'Laws, Z. V., maybe she's asleep and you can step over her!' So he took off his shoes and snooped along up, and I walked on the grass so 's not to make any noise. And when we got up real clost, what do you suppose it was, Cousin Annie Lee?"

"How sh'd I know?" exclaimed Mrs. Aaron, impatiently.

"Well, ma'am," said Mr. Willy, impressively, "it jest beat anything I ever see in all my life! It was n't a single, solitary soul! No 'm, not one livin' soul! I tell you what, I reckon Flora 'll be the one to stand fast and firm in that fam'ly! Cousin Annie Lee, there was a sheet folded in half and laid out on the floor o' the po'ch right in front o' the door, and a

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pillor at one end of it, and a blanket turned down. Yes 'm, that 's what it was! And that door was locked tight, too."

Mr. Willy looked at his cousin intently for a moment, as if trying to convey the full meaning of his words. Mrs. Aaron's tightly closed lips had taken on their humorous downward twist. Then Mr. Willy went on. "I never see anything equal to the sight of Zebedee V. a-standin' there in his stockin' feet, with his shoes in his hand, a-lookin' at that bed laid out on the floor of the po'ch. He said he cert'n'y had n't looked forward to spendin' none of his honeymoon a-takin' the fresh-air cure. I felt so bad for him, I told him I reckoned I better be goin'. Yes 'm."

Mrs. Aaron Posey settled back in her rocker, and it was several minutes before she spoke. Then, "I 'm goin' to call on that woman to-morrer," she said.

V

Mrs. Aaron was not the only one who went to call on the new Mrs. Zebedee V. The wedding was the talk of Pocahontas for weeks, and everyone was anxious to meet the bride. Her first appearance at church — and she did not go until she had made suitable clothes for all the eight — was the greatest sensation in years. Zebedee V. was not a church member; his children had been brought up, as Mrs. Aaron always declared, “jest any which a way”; but it was evident that a new régime had begun for the little Slocums as well as for their father. It was a proud day for Flora, and a prouder one for Pocahontas and the Methodist minister, when ten Slocums marched into church,

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clad in new raiment, eight of them looking a little frightened, one sulky, and one triumphant.

Mrs. Aaron's friendship for the newcomer had ripened rapidly, and her sisters had been pleased to follow her example. Mrs. Sissy, indeed, made the most of their distant relationship, and helped with the sewing. Miss Julia Higgins, as a person of elegant leisure compared to the married women, had gone to Baltimore with Flora's shopping list; even Mrs. Aaron helped, by taking the two youngest boys home with her to get them out of Flora's way; and after a week Zebedora came too.

The girl was a prime favorite with Mrs. Aaron, and dearly loved by Mr. Posey; it was what Mrs. Zebedee V. had said about her the day of Mrs. Posey's first call that began their friendship.

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“And Zora,” Mrs. Slocum said, “Zora, poor little thing, looks as if she never had a minute of girlhood in her life! Why, the first morning I was here, did n’t I find her up and making the fire when I got downstairs?”

“I reckon she ’s made it since she could walk,” Mrs. Aaron remarked.

“I found out as much,” said Flora. “But it did n’t take me long to put an end to that! I told her to go upstairs and tell her pa to hurry down. He ’s been makin’ the fires ever since!”

Mrs. Aaron smiled, and put her bonnet strings back over her shoulders. “I ’ve known Zebedee V. Slocum longer ’n you have,” she said, “and I can put it forth as my opinion that exercise won’t hurt him.”

“It don’t hurt anybody,” Flora declared. “Land! if I could n’t stir around,

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I'd die! But Zora's got to be looked after, Mrs. Posey. She's on my mind more than any of 'em. She's carried this family about long enough, and the sooner she finds out she's got a mother the better it'll be for all concerned."

"Why, you don't think she minds your bein' here, do you?" Mrs. Aaron asked.

Flora shook her head. "Well, it's a change for her, you know. We must admit that. And it takes anybody a little while to get used to a change."

"The pore child's been worked to death so long, I reckon she's forgot what anything else is like. It jest seems strange to her; don't you reckon that's it?"

Flora laughed a little. "Maybe. But" — she looked at the older woman somewhat deprecatingly — "but she actually resents seein' her pa work. She flew right out at me the other day, and said she'd

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always done for him, and did n't see why she should n't keep right on. Poor little thing! I wanted to take her in my arms and hug her; but we have n't got that far yet."

Both the childless women were stirred with maternal tenderness towards the slip of a girl who felt so maternally towards her father.

"Maybe you better let me take her home for a little visit," Mrs. Aaron suggested.

"Not quite yet," Flora replied. "She better get a little more used to seeing me here first. And besides, I do most dreadfully want to fix her up a little bit. Land! she has n't a decent dress to her name; and as for underclothes!" She shook her head, and Mrs. Aaron understood. "She's as pretty as a picture, if I do say it of my own stepchild; and I'm just ach-

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ing to get her dressed up the way a girl ought to be."

"I wonder if my lawn with the black-and-white pansy would n't cut over for her?" Mrs. Aaron suggested.

But Flora smiled and shook her head. "Thank you and thank you again," she said. "But I think you and all the rest o' Pocahontas have done enough for this family. I got a little money o' my own, and I mean to use it in ways I want to. This here 's the first way."

So the sewing began, and as soon as Zora was fitted out to her stepmother's satisfaction, she was packed off to visit Mrs. Aaron, and, as Flora told her when she kissed her good-bye as tenderly as if she had been all her own, to get some roses into her cheeks and some fat on her bones.

Mr. Willy took her out to the Posey

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farm in his Dayton. "Here's a ve'y valuable registered bundle for you," he said, when Mrs. Aaron and her husband and the little boys came out to the wagon to meet them. "It's marked 'HANDLE WITH CARE,' and I reckon that means you got to take mighty good care of it and feed it up right smart. 'Cause it don't weigh as much as it oughter."

Zora kissed him on the cheek with the unthinking familiarity of long devotion. "Uncle Willy, you go see Pa every day while I'm gone, you hear?" she admonished him.

The girl had worked and gone weighted with responsibility too long, however, to respond at once to rest and good care. The roses did not come, and good Mrs. Aaron, wondering if she were homesick or had something on her mind, used to look after her with very tender eyes when she

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sent her out with the boys to get the early vegetables for dinner or to gather eggs. One evening she found the girl huddled on the doorstep in the twilight, looking off towards Pocahontas Center; somehow, although she had not herself wept within the memory of man, she knew that there must be tears in Zora's eyes.

“ I would n't fret, honey, ef I was you, and had as bright a time ahead of me as you have.”

But Zora's head went down upon her knees. “ I jest can't bear to think o' that woman a-orderin' of my Pa around! ” she wailed.

Mrs. Aaron felt in honor bound to respect the girl's loyalty, but later she took it out on Mr. Posey — as she did most things.

“ A body 'd think she was a man, she 's that bewitched with Zebedee V. Slocum!

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Daughter or no daughter, ef he was parent to me *I'd* see through him!"

"Now, now," said Mr. Posey, who was well accustomed to his wife's outbursts. "The child ain't well, that's all the matter with her. She's got plenty o' sense, and it ain't going to take her long to get used to Mis' Slocum. But she ain't well."

That set Mrs. Aaron thinking, and the next afternoon she sent the children off after strawberries, and went out to the barn to her husband.

"Mr. Posey," she said, "I ain't never heard nothin' actually against that young man that's settled in Pocahontas as a doctor, have you?"

Mr. Posey looked a little astonished. "Why, no," he replied, holding on to the rheumatic spot in his back that was so apt to give a twinge when he stood up too suddenly.

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“And he’s jest from out the medicine schools, and he’s young and good-lookin’. I wisht you’d hitch up and go down for him. I want him to prescribe for Zora.”

Where Zora was concerned Mr. Posey would have gone to the ends of the earth, and it was not long before the young doctor had charge of the case, as he called it. He took Zora for a child, at first, so little and slight was she. Mrs. Aaron told him her age, however, when she went out to his buggy with him.

“She’s had too much father, that’s what’s the matter with her,” she told him. “Maybe you’ve met him, Zebedee V. Slocum? Zora’s his eldest, and she’s been working for the family fifteen years, she bein’ now seventeen.”

“What, that child?” the young doctor exclaimed.

“Um hum. And, praise be, now she’s

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got a new ma, and her and me 's fixin' to get the girl into bein' a girl, like she ought to be. You do your part, young man, and Pocahontas shall hear of it."

The young man laughed, and found many an occasion afterwards to laugh still more. Whether it was the magic of his prescriptions or of his smile, roses began to come to Zora; and at the end of two weeks she suggested, of her own accord, that she would like to go down to Pocahontas to see "how Ma 's gettin' on — and Pa!" and it was the doctor who drove her down.

Flora welcomed her with open arms, and there were so many delightful changes at home that Zora soon found herself well enough to return. It was really she who did most towards getting her father to church; for Mr. Slocum, although he stood in wholesome awe of

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his wife, was also beginning to respond to her excellent care of him, her delicious cooking, the wholesome exercise which she made him take — was, in fact, beginning rather to feel his oats.

But he went to church; and during the sermon he became inspired with the idea which later swept him on to fame. There was too much to do about the farm during the summer for him to spare time enough to develop it. For that, it needed the short days of late autumn, the early darkness which allowed him to steal away back of the barn for a surreptitious pipe before Flora missed him, and for the comparative leisure to which her energetic forehandedness forced him long before his neighbors were, so to speak, battened down for the winter.

VI

The news reached Mrs. Aaron Posey one afternoon in November, when the winds and rain had been keeping her at home. She looked out of her sitting-room window, over her whizzing sewing-machine, and nodded to Mr. Willy, who had just tied the weary Alexander very securely to the fence.

“ Good evenin’, Cousin Annie Lee,” he called out, cheerily. He had in his hand a paper in a yellow wrapper, and opened the door of the sitting-room without ceremony of knocking.

Mrs. Aaron first clicked up the presser and snapped the thread, then said,

“ Why, good evenin’, Cousin Willy; got some mail for us? ”

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“Only a seed catalogue. Cousin Hanson Brown bought his seed from this party last year.”

“You seen Cousin Hanson to-day? I heard Little Hanse hed a getherin’ on his hand.”

“Yes ’m, he has so. But I reckon it ain’t going to ’mount to much. He’s jest got a situation with Zebedee V. as sup’intendent.”

“What! What you talkin’ about, Cousin Willy?”

“Yes ’m,” said Mr. Willy, with great gusto, and settling himself farther back in his chair. “I’s right smart su’prised myself when I heard it. Little Hanse’s got a position with Zebedee V. as sup’intendent.”

“As sup’intendent!” exclaimed Mrs. Aaron, incredulously. “Sup’intend what, I’d like to know? Will you please tell me what that man’s up to now?”

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“ Well ’m,” said Mr. Willy, rocking comfortably, “ I reckon he ’s got a holt of a right good thing. He ’s got up what ’s called the Pocahontas Construction Company, and the idea is to make the Center a good deal more of a metrop’lis than it is at present. They ain’t no reason why Pocahontas ain’t a bigger place. We got a railroad and a river, and it only needs a dam to make all the water power needed for half a dozen mills. We’re in the middle of a rich farming distric’, and all we have to do is to give it a air and make it known in the over-crowded centers o’ population. Yes ’m.”

Mrs. Aaron Posey stared a moment, then sniffed. She recognized the source of Mr. Willy’s arguments.

“ What ’s all that got to do with Little Hanse’s being sup’intendent? ” she demanded.

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“He’s sup’intendent o’ the construction comp’ny.”

“What’s Zebedee V.?”

“Well ’m, he’s pres’dent and gen’l manager. Yes ’m.”

“What does Flora say to it?” Mrs. Posey asked.

“It ain’t a woman’s affair,” Mr. Willy evaded, evidently quoting again.

“Hum!” Mrs. Aaron held herself very straight, and jerked her head. “What’s he goin’ to construc’ first?”

“Well ’m, I reckon he’s got to construc’ the comp’ny first, and then he’s goin’ to build the dam.”

Mr. Willy Posey smiled broadly. Mrs. Aaron began to rock more vigorously; her lips were set in a firm, straight line, while she cogitated upon what she knew of Zebedee V., and what she had heard of construction companies; but even a

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woman will, sometimes, hit a nail squarely on its head, and Mrs. Aaron might be said to have done so when she asked,

“Look a here, Cousin Willy, where’s the money a-comin’ from?”

Mr. Willy hesitated a moment. “Well ’m,” he said, “a construction comp’ny gene’lly has shares that sells for so much apiece. Then the money they get for constructin’ goes to pay the interest on the shares. Yes ’m.”

“Does Zebedee V. Slocum expect to sell his shares in the centers o’ population, or jest around here?”

“Well ’m,” said Mr. Willy with dignity, as he rose to go, “I reckon we all are able to s’pport home industries. Cousin Hanson Brown’s took one hund’ed shares already, and Mr. Abel Higgins’s took a hund’ed. Unc’ Lewis Cary’s took fifty, and ole Zeb Slocum and

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Frank Slocum's took some. I reckon Zebedee V.'s got a holt of a right good thing this time. Yes 'm."

Mrs. Aaron had walked to the side of the road with him. "Yes," she said, "I reckon he has. I never knew one o' Zebedee V. Slocum's little games but what turned out heads I win, tails you lose."

Mrs. Aaron went about getting her supper that night with set lips and determined air, as did many another good wife in the vicinity of Pocahontas. The new construction company became at once the matter of first consideration. All of the men who had come under the spell of Zebedee V.'s eloquence at the store were entranced with the idea of the greater Pocahontas, of seeing their village become a thriving center of business activity. Already in their imaginations they heard the sweet music of the rattle of machin-

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ery, the jangling and sizzling of electric cars, the clatter of freight at the station, the shuffling of many feet on the sidewalks. They saw their small investments thriving, bringing them wealth hitherto undreamed of.

The women alone were skeptical. No one liked to speak of it to Mrs. Slocum, and no one thought any the less of her for her husband's ebullitions; they all knew, from their own experience, the difficulty of keeping a husband always within bounds; and unlike Flora, they had all known Zebedee V. for years. Mrs. Aaron Posey was by no means the only one who saw with foreboding her husband's money going into what she believed a most precarious enterprise; she was not the only one who used against it every argument and persuasion at her command.

The company was organized, however,

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and its shares were sold — not on the stock exchanges of the cities, but to the loyal voters of Pocahontas. Its president was not idle. Before the first freeze a small dam was thrown across the river, not far below the covered bridge, “as a starter,” Mr. Slocum explained, and the water had scarcely begun to rise back of it when the company engaged in its second undertaking.

Mrs. Aaron Posey heard of that, too, from the carrier, as her husband was aware when he got home from the store that afternoon; she was silent at supper, and, moreover, there was no hot bread, and the coffee was weak. There are ways of making a man feel his dependence and his duty!

It was too late in the season to sit out of doors, so Mr. Posey had to stay in the sitting-room. He had read every adver-

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tisement in his "Sun Paper," and the next would not come until Monday. He was primed with news, and longing to tell it, but the wife of his bosom maintained a forbidding silence. When she had finished putting away the dishes she brought in a square, white hat-box, set it on the table with a thump that made the flame fly up the lamp-chimney, and took out her best velvet bonnet. Mr. Posey watched her with amazement; when she began to untrim the bonnet, with quick little snips of the scissors and ripping jerks, his curiosity broke bounds.

"For Gord's sake, Annie Lee," he exclaimed, "air you gone crazy?"

"Not as I know of," said his wife. As she ripped out the stitches she put the small bits of thread into her mouth, and her voice sounded muffled, coming as it must from between closed teeth.

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“What you doin’ with your best velvet bonnet?”

“I ’m gettin’ it ready for the Chris’mas missionary box to the Indians, that’s what I ’m doin’. I guess I won’t need it any more, myself.”

“Now, Annie Lee, I don’t see what you doin’ that for,” said Mr. Posey, rather weakly. Her answer was a jerk that ripped off one string. “I don’t see what you want to send it to the Indians for.”

“It’s to be hoped the missionaries gets ’em to church sometimes,” said Mrs. Aaron. “Somebody might’s well have the use o’ my bonnet, seein’ ’s I won’t have any church to wear it to.”

Mr. Posey faced her squarely, leaning forward, his hands grasping the arms of his chair. “Why ain’t you goin’ to have any church to wear it to?” he demanded.

“I reckon by the time Zebedee V. Slo-

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cum 's slid that church down the hill they won't be enough of it left to set in, and I'm downright certain they won't be enough money left outside of his pockets to pay for a new one."

Mr. Posey saw the futility of a direct answer. He addressed the clock on the mantel-piece: "You cain't expect a woman to understand business matters!"

Mrs. Posey chewed her threads in silence for a few moments, but she was only collecting her forces.

"Then some men would be a good sight better off if they knew as little about 'em as women," she said. "Ef I was n't a good member o' the Meth'dist church, when they *is* a Meth'dist church, I'd be willin' to bet right smart that not one woman in Pocahontas would be taken in by Zebedee V. Slocum like the men's been."

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“ I don’t see how a dividend-payin’ construction comp’ny can take anybody in,” said Mr. Posey.

“ You had any dividends yet? ”

“ Annie Lee, you cain’t expect — ”

“ I ain’t expectin’! Don’t you think I ’m such a fool as to expect to get anything out o’ that comp’ny. I know better, and so ought you. The only person that ’ll get anything out o’ that will be Zebedee V. Slocum.”

“ I cain’t see what all the women’s so down on Zebedee V. for; I cain’t to save my life! ”

Mrs. Aaron sniffed. “ I don’t relish payin’ for one-ninth of another woman’s iron fence,” she said.

“ Now you know very well, Annie Lee, that that fence is samples.”

“ I don’t know no sech thing. What I do know is that one part of his fence is

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like ours, and one part is like Cousin Joseph Todd's, and the front gate part is like Cousin Hanson Brown's; I know they 's nine different kinds of iron fences around Zebedee V. Slocum's front yard, and each piece of fence is like some other iron fence that he sold here in Pocahontas. And I know he has a fence on four sides, if it is in nine patterns, and not another soul in the place has a fence but on one side. I know we paid for one-ninth of that fence of his, and therefore I say he 's a rascal. That 's what he is, a rascal. How a sensible woman like Flora Slocum can stand him does beat me!"

Mr. Posey remonstrated. "I don't think you got any call to say that, Annie Lee. At the time everybody in Pocahontas put up a fence, Zebedee V. showed every man in the store a letter from the fence comp'ny saying it was sendin'

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him samples, and that fence of his is samples."

"I don't believe it. I don't believe a word he says."

"You believed him all right when he come out here to sell you a bakin' pan and electric bells, I notice!"

"A bakin' pan ain't a iron fence, nor yet a construction comp'ny. Any woman knows a good bakin' pan as soon as she sets eyes on it. And I ain't sorry I bought that electric bell, either. I reckon I'll get a dollar ninety-eight cents' worth of wear out of it before I die. Not but what I do think it was queer doings, his givin' them away to everybody in town that could n't afford to buy them."

"That jest goes to prove that he's a public-sperited man. He wanted Pocahontas to stand in the front ranks of the march o' progress."

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“So he said. It jest happened to be about election time, and he was up for highway commissioner.”

“Well, I know that. But he had a new floor put in the bridge, and the old one had been in holes for three years before he was elected.”

“Good thing he did, if he’s going to tote the church over it.”

Mr. Posey’s fist came down on the table. “Good Lord, ain’t that like a woman! Tote a church over a covered bridge! Haw! haw!”

His laugh was triumphant. Mr. Posey had scored, and was a man again. Mrs. Posey arose, the bonnet box in her hand. The dispute was at an end. She went to bed.

VII

The next morning, after the singing of the last hymn, the minister came to the front of the platform, and said that he wished to inform the brethren and sisters of his flock that, with his consent and encouragement, a great change had been decided upon during the past week by those in authority in the church. He said:

“As the Jews of old loved their city, dear friends, so do we love this place of our habitation. We wish to see this town of Pocahontas in a flourishing condition. We wish to bring in the stranger and the wayfa'er from the roadside, that he may enjoy with us

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the privileges and advantages that are ours. We wish to see the old mill down yonder by the river-side makin' the same racket that it used to make, and we wish to see more mills alongside of it. We wish to bring many people from the crowded marts of trade to this golden opportunity which their comin' will bring to this town. As the store and the station down yonder have been the brain, so to speak, of this great and glorious enterprise, so we may say this church up here on the hill has been its heart. Yes, my brethren, its heart indeed; for oftentimes the very air in this buildin' has throbbed with the unfoldin' of the secrets of many hearts in silent prayer, and the desires and thanks of many have been expressed through my humble voice. What more appropriate, nay, more imperative, therefore, than to join heart and brain, so long

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apart? How much better will be the appearance of our beloved town, when the incomin' multitude can behold this church alongside of the store, than when it cain't see it at all as it is up here on the hill? It has been decided, therefore, to have the church moved down the hill to the Center, and the great undertakin' has been intrusted to the Pocahontas Construction Company, of which so many of the flock are stockholders.

“The brother whose noble brain first brought forth the idea of a greater Pocahontas, Mr. Zebedee V. Slocum, contracts with us to move this church buildin' so gently and securely that not a window light shall be broken, not a crack shall appear in the plasterin', not a pew shall be upset nor a hymn-book spilled to the floor. Moreover, we shall be able to hold our We'nesday night prayer-meetin's

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and our Sabbath day services as usual, in whatsoever place the church happens to be in at the time. All the members of the flock have to do is to keep on down the road till they get to the church. We shall meet again, brethren, next Wednesday night at seven o'clock."

But the brethren met first outside of the church door, and to eager questioners it was further revealed that the church was to stand in its final resting place beside the store on or before the first of March following, which was allowing nearly three months for its descent "an' turnin' around the corner," as Mr. Willy Posey explained. Furthermore, so certain was Mr. Slocum of his ability to do the work in the specified time, the Pocahontas Construction Company pledged itself to forfeit ten dollars for every day's delay after March first.

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The following Wednesday evening was marked by the largest attendance at prayer-meeting ever known in the history of the congregation. The men were out in unbroken ranks, and all the women came except those who were bedridden or who had no one to leave at home with young children. Indeed, two or three even brought their babies. The little building was crowded, but the meeting itself was rather quiet, for there was general disappointment at finding the church still on its foundation. The yard and the road in front showed signs of activity; piles of lumber and logs had been dumped in inconvenient places, and Deacon Julius Todd's buggy upset; but Mrs. Todd fortunately having been one of those who stayed at home, the accident caused but little commotion.

On the following Sunday the congre-

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gation found the church resting on logs just in front of its old position. Mrs. Aaron Posey declared afterward that she had caught "neurology" from sitting so close to the ground, "and no cellar underneath," and thereafter Mr. Aaron Posey attended church alone. They had been married twenty-three years, and Mr. Posey did not refer to the untrimmed bonnet that had been sent to the Indians, though he heard his wife tell her sister, Mrs. Sissy Slocum, that she wore her brown felt because it was warmer — "and a blessed good thing I did."

Mrs. Aaron Posey denied her husband the pleasure of discussing the progress of the church in its descent, but she heard all the news from the postman. One Monday afternoon Mr. Willy Posey said:

"Yes 'm. It's down in front of Mr. Lewis Lee's house, and old Mis' Lee says

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the singin' yest'day mornin' heartened her up more 'n anythin' she's heard sence her stroke. Seem like it was right in her room, she says. Yes 'm."

"What they done about Cousin Joseph Todd's fence they run into?" asked Mrs. Aaron.

"They cain't do nothin' with it. Cousin Joseph Todd says Zebedee V.'s got to replace it with the piece of his fence that's like it, an' I reckon that's jest what he *will* have to do. Yes 'm."

"I'm glad of it. I'm glad Cousin Joseph Todd's got spunk enough to make Zebedee V. Slocum pay up. It'll jest do me good every time I see that gap in his fence of samples. I wish there was a gap as big as the whole fence."

In the course of a month the church had moved slowly down the road, not

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without small accidents and excitements, past the rows of gray-stone cottages, in front of the disused mill, until early in January it stood on the muddy bank of the river which ran some twelve or fifteen feet below, and about a hundred feet from the covered bridge and the road which had been its pathway. Then set in the first real snow of the winter, for the light flurries of December had melted quickly, leaving their moisture in the roads and ground. For ten days the church waited in the snow, and churchgoing lessened perceptibly.

“ Might 'a' known the winter was n't goin' to hold off on his account,” said Mrs. Aaron Posey. “ What's Zebedee V. Slocum goin' to do with the church when the snow does melt? ”

“ Well 'm,” replied the postman, “ he's got to get her down on to the river, before he can get her over.”

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“*On* to the river!” exclaimed Mrs. Aaron. “Does he expect the church to float over, or jest to walk across?”

“No, ma’am. Neither. He’ll work her across on logs, same’s he’s brought her down the hill. He’s got logs long enough to reach acrost the river. Good thing it ain’t any broader’n it is.”

“How’s he goin’ to get it down that bank?”

“Well’m, when he hitches on the horses and mewels he’ll hitch some on the front and some on the back, and the front ones’ll pull her down the bank and the back ones’ll ease her.”

“Hum,” said Mrs. Aaron, prophetically, “I reckon he’ll find he cain’t cajoodle dumb animals into doin’ whatsoever he wants, same’s he can men.”

Her prophecy was fulfilled; Mr. Slocum’s plan met with disaster. From the

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day when the church reached the bank of the stream the elements seemed leagued against the Pocahontas Construction Company. First came the snow, which was the deepest even Uncle Lewis Cary could remember; the white drifts piled around the church as high as the windows. Time was passing, however, and Zebedee V. and his young superintendent urged their employees to vigorous work. They shoveled snow away from the church, and they shoveled a wide path to the river, finally succeeding in placing their logs across it, fastening two, slanting downwards from the top of the bank, to serve as a slide.

Then came the great day when the church was to be lowered. The January thaw was just beginning, and the tramping of many feet made the banks very slippery. The delivery of the mail was

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late that day, for every man in the vicinity was on hand to watch the proceedings. By noon the horses and mules were hitched to the church, some on the opposite side of the river, ready to pull it, by means of long chains and ropes, down the steep path to the bed of logs below, and some hitched to the back of it, facing towards the hill, ready to "ease her." At first all went well.

"It did seem like she'd slide right down into place," said the postman to Mrs. Aaron Posey later in the afternoon.

"First she moved along over the mud like a sleepy tar'pin. The horses and mewels on our side of the river backed along jest the way they'd oughter; and then she reached the aidge of the bank, and little by little she begun to stick out over it. Yes 'm. It cert'n'y was a unusual



“ First thing we all knew she begun to topple ”

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sight to see a church stickin' out over a river, half on land and half out in the air. But she did n't stay that a way very long. No 'm. First thing we all knew she begun to topple. Zebedee V. saw that 's the critical moment. Little Hanse was a-drivin' his horses and mewels on the other side of the river for all they's worth, and Zebedee V. hollered to them on our side of the river to start 'em up to'rds the hill so 's to ease the church whilst she slid down. Jest a minute before that he 'd been a-hollerin' to 'em to back, and I reckon them animals got their orders mixed. Yes 'm. 'Stead o' goin' up hill they jest kept right on backin', and ef little Hanse's team had n't a-kept on pullin' mighty hard and fast I reckon the church would 'a' landed on her side. As 't was she come down with a jolt and a squinch that must 'a' racked her right

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smart. You could jest *hear* the plasterin' fallin' down inside."

Mr. Willy Posey paused for breath; Mrs. Aaron exclaimed:

"Plasterin'! For the land's sake, Cousin Willy, you don't mean to tell me there's anything at all left o' the church after sech a jolt as that!"

"Yes 'm. Oh, yes 'm! The outside's all right. Zebedee V. had the winder lights took out before he started her. They ain't any harm done to the outside, exceptin' the steeple."

"The steeple! What's the matter with *it*?"

"Well 'm, the jolt kinder loosened the roof like, and one side o' the steeple went in'ards."

"You don't say! Smashed in?"

"No 'm. It ain't smashed. One side of it fell inside like, and the steeple's

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pointin' out over the front door, 'stead of standin' up straight."

"Well, I never!" exclaimed Mrs. Aaron Posey. "Ef that don't beat all! The church in the middle of the river settin' on logs, and the steeple pointin' out over the front door. Ef that ain't downright scandalous!"

"Yes 'm," said Mr. Willy Posey as he went out, "it don't look very dignified, that's a fact; but it won't be out in the river long, for Zebedee V.'s a-goin' to have her up the other bank to-morrer."

VIII

But Mr. Willy was not as good a prophet as Mrs. Aaron, for again the elements intervened. The thaw set in that night in earnest, and as the snow had been the deepest known in years, the thaw was proportionately heavy. The river rose rapidly. The efforts of the construction company to haul the church from its moist bed resulted only in pulling the logs loose from the mud which had held them in place, and by Sunday the rising waters had carried the church down stream until it rested against the covered bridge. The torrents were lessening, and the church just beginning to settle on the rocky river bed, when sud-

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denly the weather changed again, and in twenty-four hours the church was held fast in an icy grip.

The freshets had washed away some wooden trestles of the railroad, so that for days there was no mail, and Mrs. Aaron Posey had scant news until Thursday afternoon.

“Well, Cousin Annie Lee,” began Mr. Willy Posey, “they’s been high doings down at the river. Reckon we all ain’t had as much excitement as this, not sence ever.”

“Well, I reckon you might’s well get somethin’ out of it,” said Mrs. Aaron, philosophically, “seein’ ’s you ain’t goin’ to have any church left.”

“Yes ’m, that’s a fact! But I reckon they’ll be some left, notwithstanding all the contrapshuns it’s been through. Co’s the steeple ’ll need fixin’, and they’ll

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have to be right smart of plasterin', but I reckon she 'll come out in pretty good shape otherways."

"I heard they had n't gotten it out 'n the river yet."

"No 'm, that they ain't. She's friz in hard and fast, and Unc' Lewis Cary says he cain't ever remember sech a winter's this un's been, not sence long before the War. Yes 'm. The ice is jest piled up around that church every w'ich-a-ways, and they cert'n'y cain't do nothin' tell the freeze breaks up."

"Hum! I reckon by the time that church gets set in place pretty much all the religion 'll be friz out of this c'm-munity," said Mrs. Aaron.

The winter developed into the most severe ever known in Maryland, and the freeze lasted through all the four weeks

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of February and into March. The Pocahontas Construction Company had agreed to pay a forfeit for each day's delay after March first. Eighty dollars was due before the thaw came, and then for several days the water was too high for work, although Mr. Slocum took care to anchor the church to keep it away from the bridge. Long before this, however, public opinion in Pocahontas began to change, and expressions of doubt or disapproval were frequently heard.

"Yes 'm," said Mr. Willy Posey, "people cert'n'y is gettin' right dissatisfied. Mr. Abel White says if he'd a known how *his* good money's a-goin' he never would a took ary hund'ed shares of that stock, and Mis' Frank Slocum told me Mis' Moses Cary says she never did think it right to move a church anyways, and the minister told her 't it looked to

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him like a dispensation of the Lord, 'count of movin' the church from its high hill unto a lowly place."

"Seems to me a good deal more like the dispensation o' the Lord," said Mrs. Aaron Posey, severely, "to serve all you men right for bein' sech dumb fools as to get took in by one of Zebedee V. Slocum's schemes."

Mr. Willy jumped. "Laws now, Cousin Annie Lee," he exclaimed, "Don't you come at me that a way. I reckon ef you's down at the store and could hear Zebedee V. talk, you could n't stand up against him any better'n the men folks."

"Oh, could n't I?" asked Mrs. Aaron sarcastically. "Well, maybe I could n't. And maybe I'd stand by and watch him back a church into a river, too, would n't I?"

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By the end of March what was left of the church stood on the road, "Like unto the Ark on Ararat," the minister said. But no dove of peace flew forth from it. It was not until Easter, which was late that year, that the congregation met again within its walls. The Monday following being a holiday, there was no mail delivery; but on Tuesday Mr. Willy Posey came garrulous with news.

"Why, good evenin', Cousin Annie Lee," he began. "I suppose you heard the news?"

"I reckon that depends on what it is," replied Mrs. Aaron, cannily.

"Well 'm," and Mr. Willy's voice seemed to hold a joyful note, as if he were bringing good tidings, "the Pocahontas Construction Company's gone out of business! Yes 'm."

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“Hum! I ain’t surprised. Froze out er washed out?”

“Well ’m, Zebedee V. says he hopes it’s a temporary retirement, but Cousin Hanson Brown says he reckons it ain’t. The company was nine hund’ed dollars in debt, and the stockholders had to pay up. Yes ’m. Little Hanse bein’ only nineteen years old, Cousin Hanson had to pay his share too, and old Zeb Slocum had to pay up for Zebedee V., except what Zebedee V. borrowed from his first wife’s Aunt Lucy. Unc’ Lewis Cary says he reckons Cousin Hanson Brown about expressed the sentiments of the community when he said Pocahontas like it is will be good enough for him hereafter, without bringin’ in hordes o’ foreigners from the marts o’ trade. And Cousin Joseph Todd says if one construction company can do as much damage to this town as this one did, he

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ain't for invitin' no trusts to come settle here. Deacon Julius says it was managed wrong all through, and we 'd ought to 'a' waited till the minister's two years was up, and done the movin' of the church in a interval like, and saved the amount of the minister's salary by so doin'. Yes 'm."

That night after supper Mr. Aaron Posey was conscious of something unusual in the atmosphere. His wife went about her ordinary evening duties, but Mr. Posey, watching her furtively, imagined that he could detect a slight aggressiveness in her manner, perhaps even an assumption of authority. He was surprised that she did not sit down after the supper dishes were put away, but his surprise turned to wonder, and then to amazement, when he saw her bring out the cold

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meat, cut off several slices, then lay two boiled potatoes on a plate, and arrange several other eatables as if for a cold meal.

“What you doin’ that for, Annie Lee?” he asked, timidly.

“I ’m a-gettin’ your dinner ready for to-morrer,” she replied.

“Gettin’ my dinner ready *now*?”

“Yes, I am! I ’m a-gettin’ it ready now. I ain’t ever made you cook for yourself yet, have I? I ’m goin’ down to Balt’mer to-morrer.”

Mr. Aaron Posey fairly jumped. “You goin’ to Balt’mer *to-morrer*?”

“That’s what I said. I ’m goin’ to Balt’mer. An’ I ’m goin’ to-morrer. Ef you can afford to spend fifty dollars on shares of a fool construction comp’ny, and then chip in twenty-two more to help Zebedee V. Slocum out of a hole, I reckon

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I can afford to go down to Balt'mer and buy myself a new bonnet. And that's jest what I'm goin' to do."

"Laws now, Annie Lee," said Mr. Aaron, "who's been tellin' you all that?" But his wife vouchsafed no answer.

IX

If Mrs. Flora Slocum knew anything whatever of the workings and untimely end of the ill-fated Pocahontas Construction Company, she gave no evidence of it to anyone outside her own family. As Mrs. Posey said, she had not known Zeb-
edee V. as long as the women of Pocahontas; she may have been waiting to know more of him; or it may be that her years of experience had taught her the expediency of biding her time. Not even Zeb-
edee V. really knew what his wife thought about it; but if he had been as learned in the psychology of the fair sex as he believed himself, he might have foreseen complications in the future. Flora had been managing all her life, and her con-

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tact with the world had not taught her very much awe of masculine creatures; but after all, this was her first experience in managing a husband; and even as husbands go, Zebedee V. was in a class by himself. She might succeed in suppressing his courage; she might even succeed in putting him to work; but his imagination was not to be harnessed to things mundane; it was bound to rise unscathed from every catastrophe.

There were a few weeks, after the descent of the church, when he seemed to find the comfort of his own side porch preferable to meeting his neighbors at the store; but without him the element of romance so dear to all men would have been absent from Pocahontas; it was not long before they welcomed him among them as before.

For several months the habitual calm

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of the neighborhood was unbroken. Then, one day in July, Mrs. Aaron Posey was moved to ask the carrier,

“ Who ’s that woman visitin’ Mis’ Julius Todd? ”

Mr. Willy was enjoying a glass of buttermilk on his cousin’s side porch; he did not answer at once, but seemed intent on examining the streaks of milk and little bits of butter on the side of his glass. Mrs. Aaron shuffled him on.

“ I said, who ’s that visitin’ Mis’ Julius Todd? ”

“ Ma’am? ” queried Mr. Willy, with a maddeningly absent-minded air.

Mrs. Aaron’s patience was never long. “ For the land’s sake, Cousin Willy, you certainly are gettin’ hard o’ hearin’. I do hope I ’ll keep all my faculties. If I was you I ’d wear my flannels — ”

“ Yes ’m,” said Mr. Willy, hurriedly.

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He was beginning to entertain a certain dislike of any reference to signs of youth's departing. "Yes 'm. That 's Miss Boker — given name Mary Lou."

"Thank you. Now I know jest about as much as I did before. I don't know what's got into the men," Mrs. Aaron cried. "I asked Mr. Posey who she was, and he said he reckoned you knew about as much as anybody else, and stalked out to the barn in a huff. And now here are you acting like a dumb fool when I ask you about her. I certainly would like to know what's come over everybody here lately."

"Well, now, I tell you what it is, Cousin Annie Lee; you know as well as I do that I never was one to go round discussin' people. Mis' Julius Todd's got jest as good a right as any to have whosoever she wants to visit her."

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Mrs. Aaron's outburst of wrath was perhaps justifiable. "Has anybody said she had n't?" she demanded. "What in the name o' goodness is the matter with the men?"

"It ain't the men," said Mr. Willy, "it's the ladies, that's who it is. I never did see any use in jumpin' at conclusions and bein' uncharitable in yo' talk."

Mrs. Aaron's lips were set in their firmest line, although she had known Mr. Willy many years, and might have had time to become accustomed to his method of procedure. "Well," she snapped, "I reckon you know what you're drivin' at. I don't."

"Yes 'm," Mr. Willy went on, meditatively, "it cert'n'y does seem queer thet all the ladies goes and gets down on another lady like that. Now for *my* part I

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don't see how you can deduct any harm from a lady wearin' puffs and dressin' in pink most o' the time; and *I* think velvet shoes is real neat and stylish lookin'."

"O-o-oh!" said Mrs. Aaron, "*that's* the sort she is, is it? I reckon I begin to see daylight! I jest knew they's some'n queer about that woman, from the way you men been goin' on about her."

"Now there it goes," cried Mr. Willy, triumphantly. "That's jest the way everybody talks! I call it right down uncharitable, that's what I do. And whilst I hope I'm as good a Methodist as any hereabouts, I ain't that narrer-minded as to look down on any other sect. Mis' Hanson Brown tol' Cousin Clara-Belle White she thought it cert'n'y did n't look right nor seemly for a deacon's wife to be harborin' a spiritualist, cousin or no cousin."

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Mrs. Aaron Posey jumped. "What!" she exclaimed. "You don't mean to tell me she's a spiritualist? A spiritualist!!!! Well, I never! Medium, I suppose?"

"Yes 'm; I reckon that's it."

"Hum," said Mrs. Posey. "Hold any seeantses?"

"I reckon so," Mr. Willy reluctantly admitted. "They was a meetin' o' some sort there last night, and Miss Boker, she went into a tranct, and told how she saw the guidin' sperits of one and another of the company, and said they wanted to communicate. Said they could n't jest make their messages clear unless 'n silver passed betwixt Miss Boker and them as wanted the communications. It certainly was interestin'." Mr. Willy, becoming warmed to his subject, had forgotten to be wary.

"Oh, it was, was it? How'd you come

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to know so much about it?" demanded Mrs. Aaron.

Mr. Willy hurriedly arose, and set his glass on the railing.

"Well, good evenin', I reckon I better be goin'," he remarked, and fled.

The next day, at dinner, Mrs. Posey said to her husband, "I got to have the horse this afternoon. I got to go down to the store."

To Mrs. Aaron a horse was a horse, and a dog a dog; there were several of each species on the farm, and all had good, serviceable names given them by Mr. Posey; but Mrs. Posey unfailingly spoke of "the horse" or "the dog," or "it." She regarded horses solely as a means of locomotion, and dogs as necessary evils. She got more speed out of horses than anyone else could, and urged

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them on with cluckings and admonitions, and jerks of the reins; and she fed the dogs, but forbade them the house.

Mr. Posey rubbed his chin; his wife always recognized that as a sign of temporizing. "Which horse?" he asked.

"The sorrel," said his wife, firmly. "I have n't got any time to waste dawdling on the road. I want a horse that can get me there."

"We-e-ell, I been using Jenny this morning," Mr. Posey began; but his wife cut him short.

"And I'll use it this afternoon," she said.

She met the doctor on the road; he drew up beside her, and she smiled at him graciously between her "whoas" to the sorrel.

"You ain't been to see me sence Zora left," she told him, slyly.

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"Not because Miss Zora was not there," the doctor gallantly declared.

"Well, you come up on a Saturday afternoon when I'm done my bakin', and I'll give you something worth coming for," Mrs. Posey told him. "I want to talk to you about that child."

It was evident enough that the subject would be interesting to the young man. "I'm afraid she's not very well, not very strong," he said; but the sorrel refusing to endure Mrs. Aaron's methods of restraint any longer, the conversation was ended almost where it was begun.

Mrs. Posey went on to the store, and then to the house behind the nine kinds of fence. Flora was on the side porch in a rocking chair, teaching four of the small Slocums, boys and girls, how to darn their own stockings.

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“Well, I *am* glad to see you,” she told Mrs. Aaron. “Zora and I were talking this morning of driving out when we could get a horse. Zora’s up to the minister’s; the Junior Aid’s sewin’ there to-day. Children, you can go now; and Chauncey, you better run across the fields and tell Zora Mis’ Posey’s here, and not to stay for the refreshments.”

When the children were well out of the way, Mrs. Posey went at once to the subject uppermost in her mind.

“What kind of a woman is visitin’ Mis’ Julius Todd?” she asked.

Flora laughed a little, and did not stop rocking. Subtly, wordlessly, she made it plain that the fascinating stranger could not disturb her serenity. She looked at Mrs. Posey with one of those smiles which convey so much. “Then you have n’t seen her?”

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"No, and don't want to," Mrs. Posey replied.

"Well, you ought to," said Flora. "She's an object lesson in what not to wear. I wish you could 'a' seen her in her pink dress alongside of Zora in the pink dress I made her. Pink is pink, I suppose; but land! there's a lot of difference somewheres. Zora's no need to take a back seat, I know that."

"Mercy! She ain't jest a young girl, is she?" Mrs. Aaron asked. "I heard she's a spiritualist."

Again Flora smiled. "So they say. Me and mine ain't concerned with her, nor likely to be. No, she ain't jest a girl, not by a long shot; but some o' the men seem to find her a good deal to look at."

"Hum!" said Mrs. Posey, scornfully. "Men! What the men finds in some women is more'n they could tell, them-

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selves. I thank my stars I got Mr. Posey well in hand. They ain't goin' to be any looking at spiritualists from Mr. Posey."

Flora laughed outright. "Nor from Zebedee V.," she declared, and turned the conversation to more interesting matters.

X

The fascinating spiritualist was not to be so lightly dismissed, however. Her presence afforded welcome and unlimited matter for conversation and exchange of views to the good people of Pocahontas, and the meetings of the Ladies' Aid and the Missionary Societies were largely attended for several weeks. A coolness sprang up between Mrs. Julius Todd and her neighbors, who one and all agreed to avoid Mrs. Todd's house while Miss Mary Lou was a guest there. They could gather no news direct from its source, therefore, which was a great trial to Mrs. Aaron; but her grievance was not to be compared with that of many other women; for while Mr. Posey would say

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nothing whatever concerning the stranger, there were other husbands who openly declared to their wives that "They ain't any harm in that girl; all you women are jest jealous of her clo'es." Many a girl in the vicinity had a sore heart when the moonlight nights passed without the usual straw-rides for the many or buggy rides for two; the unmarried men were, one and all, rivals for Miss Boker's favor, and refused to be diverted. For a time even Mr. Willy Posey fell under the spell, and lost interest in Mrs. Posey's side porch; but Mrs. Aaron gathered enough news from other sources to be stern in disapproval whenever he had to stop with mail.

But that tide which comes in the affairs of men was bound in time to wash over Pocahontas, and one afternoon, when the spiritualist had been among them for a

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month, Mr. Willy hopped over the wheel of his Dayton with his usual cheery greeting.

“Why, good evenin’, Cousin Annie Lee!” he called out, as if he had been doing it every day.

Mrs. Posey recognized his change of attitude at once, but thought it only proper to maintain for a time a certain dignity of reserve. “Yes, very pleasant evenin’, thank you,” she said, in her most formal manner.

But Mr. Willy ignored the coolness. He sat down on the top step and began fanning himself. “Right warm for this late, ain’t it?” he began, pleasantly.

“I had n’t noticed it,” said Mrs. Aaron, shortly.

Mr. Willy began on another subject. “Cousin Abel Higgins got back from Philadelphia this mornin’.”

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“ I did n’t know he had gone,” said Mrs. Aaron.

The conversation lapsed; Mr. Willy’s pleasant smile became a little strained, and Mrs. Posey looked out at the trees and fields with unwonted interest. Then Mr. Willy’s courage returned, and he remarked cheerfully, “ That was a very fine sermon the minister preached last evenin’.”

“ I did n’t get there,” said Mrs. Posey. But Mr. Willy was not to be snubbed.

“ Well ’m, it cert’n’y was what you might call right to the point. Seems to me it’s high time for something to be done about the way things been a-goin’ on in this community here lately.”

Mrs. Posey meant to look unconcerned, but Mr. Willy thought he detected a quiver of curiosity on her lips. “ The minister’s text was, ‘ Of long time he had bewitched

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them with sorceries,' and he went on to talk about the danger of fallin' under the spell of sorceries and witchcrafts, and sech like. Said when you did you had a hard time a-gettin' back into the way of grace, same as Simon had."

"I ain't doubtin' the minister's word," said Mrs. Aaron.

"No, ma'am." Mr. Willy rubbed his chin pensively. "Seems to me it's about high time he's a-sayin' it, too. He went on to remark he greatly feared they was many o' the masculine members of his flock bein' led astray into the wilderness of spiritualism, and he was glad to take that occasion to publicly give thanks that the ewe-lambs was n't tempted so to stray. Yes 'm. He spoke real feelin', and I must say I think it's about time. I never see anything like the way the young men hereabouts been took up with this spiritualist

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business — tests and seeantses, and sech! I never see anything like it.”

“ Well, if you never saw anything like it,” said Mrs. Aaron, “ you must ’a’ had a mighty big mote in your own eye! ”

Mr. Willy went on rather more hurriedly: “ And it ain’t only the unmarried men that ’s took up with it, either. That ’s bad enough, goodness knows — pryin’ into the secrets o’ the past and the hidden pathways o’ the future. But when it comes to married men and the fathers of eight a-doin’ of it — then, as I said before, it ’s about time some notice was took of it.”

Mrs. Aaron Posey at last allowed herself to be frankly interested. “ Eight!” she exclaimed. “ Eight!! You don’t mean to tell me, Cousin Willy, that — ”

The postman’s eyes met hers in full understanding. “ Yes ’m,” he said. “ It ’s him I’m talkin’ about.”

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Mrs. Posey edged her chair forward. "You don't mean to tell me that Zebedee V. Slocum —?"

Mr. Willy shook his head slowly and sadly. "I'm afraid it's a fact," he admitted.

"Well," said Mrs. Aaron, "I reckon them that's born fools stays fools. But I did think Flora Slocum had him better in hand."

The two rocked in silence for a minute or so, and then Mrs. Posey said, in the shocked tone that she reserved for certain subjects, "I'd jest like to know what idea he's got a hold of now — goin' to a spiritualist at his time o' life."

Mr. Willy looked wise and said nothing, but continued to rock. Mrs. Aaron peered at him over her glasses. "I don't suppose you happen to know what that man's up to, do you, Cousin Willy?"

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“ Well ’m,” replied Mr. Willy, “ I never was one o’ the kind to go inquire into my neighbors’ affairs, and that you know right well. But when a thing’s told to me outright I may be said to have some idea of it.”

Mrs. Aaron’s lips tightened; such a remark was almost beyond feminine endurance. Mr. Willy saw the danger signal, perhaps with some trepidation, and hurried on:

“ I was walkin’ along the road past Mis’ Julius Todd’s the other — ”

“ Hum! ” sniffed Mrs. Aaron.

“ — night, when I noticed a light in the parlor winder. The curtains was all down, and they had the lamp a-settin’ near the winder so’s they was n’t any shadders; but I jest says to myself, says I, ‘ Now, maybe they’s somebody in there I know, and ef I wait here maybe

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I 'll have company home.' So I waited, and it was n't more 'n a little while when I felt somebody or something touch me on the shoulder. I was that startled, as you might say, that I come mighty nigh jumpin' out o' my skin; I surely did think for a little minute it was one o' them sperits excaped. Yes 'm; and when I see who it was sure enough I says, 'Laws, Z. V., what you doin' here?' and he only whispered back, 'Hush-sh-sh-sh! Come along a little.' So we walked on down the road, clost to the bushes. Zebedee V. told me he 'd been consultin' Miss Mary Lou about a message he 'd received from his guardian sperit the last time he was there. Yes 'm. I ast him how he come to crawl up on me that a way, scarin' me most out of my senses; and he said he considered he might be settin' a bad example to the youth o' Pocahontas ef 't was

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known he 'd been inquiren' into the future by means o' Miss Boker, and he snooped out the back way for that reason. Said o' course it did n't make any difference for him to be a-doin' it, for he was too old and sensible, and his character was too much formed already for him to take any harm by it."

"Character!" said Mrs. Aaron, disdainfully. "I reckon Flora Slocum'd character him if she knew of his goin's on."

"Yes 'm," admitted Mr. Willy, "I reckon it's merciful for him that she don't. He seemed to think that a way, too. Said of course his wife did n't know about his goin' there, and he'd jest as soon she did n't; not that there was any harm in it, but it was jest on a little matter o' business, and women had n't oughter be bothered with sech like de-

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tails, when they 's a man at the head o' the family."

"Business!" scoffed Mrs. Aaron.
"Fine business, I'd call it."

"Yes 'm, it was business, too!" protested Mr. Willy. "I know, 'cause he told me. He went on a-holdin' my arm and tellin' me how he'd gone there first because he wanted to see jest how much communin' with the powers o' darkness there might be in them seeantses, so 's he could know for himself and thereby warn the youth o' Pocahontas. Said you could n't expect anybody in this world to foller the good example of a person who was jest good because they did n't know about the bad side, so he was a-goin' to find out, and then keep on settin' the good example. Oh, Z. V. has real noble ideas, Cousin Annie Lee!

"So in he went, and Miss Boker went

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into a tranct right off, and said she had at last found one in Pocahontas who was a good subject, and the sperits was a-tellin' her all sorts of things about him — all talkin' at once like. Zebedee V. says he felt jest like his spine was stickin' out through his back, and when he got home again Flora ast him what made his hair so fluffity, and standin' every which-a-ways.

“ I ast him what Miss Boker told him, and he said they was one sperit seemed to want to talk more 'n the others, and Miss Boker said that was his guardian sperit, and it had to communicate that he was on the road to fortune, but that the road branched and he must be sure and take the right branch. Zebedee V. said he always *had* thought he was meant to be a person o' wealth and influence, and the sperit's sayin' so right off convinced him

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of its sincerity. Said he ast Miss Boker to ast the sperit which was the right road, and it kept a-sayin' — 'The road through the wheat, the road through the wheat.' And that's all they could get out of it that night."

"There ain't any road through wheat around here," scoffed Mrs. Aaron. "I should think that alone would 'a' convinced him it was foolishness."

"No 'm," said Mr. Willy, "it jest puzzled him, so's he had to go again! Next time it told him again the road to wealth lay through wheat, through wheat, and he's more puzzled than ever. Zebedee V. says his guardian sperit must 'a' been speakin' to him unbeknownst all his life, for Miss Boker went on to repeat for it that Zebedee V. was surely born for wealth easy come by! And he said he got to thinkin' it over, and puttin' two and

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two together like, and he plainly saw they was n't but one way to come easy by wealth — exceptin' the ways he 'd already tried — and that was by speculation, and sence the sperit insisted on a road through wheat, it must be meanin' a speculation in wheat. Once the idea come to him it all seemed plain as day. Yes 'm. Zebedee V. said he jest had to sit down and ponder on what a downright shame it was he had n't a-thought of it himself, and gone into the market in time to give his business genius a chanct to get a part o' what John D. Rockefeller and Pierpoint Morgan and the rest of 'em had took unto themselves already. Said he hoped it was n't too late, and he was n't goin' to waste any time about it now. Said it give him the shivers to think o' what he might 'a' missed ef Miss Mary Lou Boker had n't a-come to Pocahontas,

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and helped his guardian sperit to communicate with him. Zebedee V. said he 's so downright grateful to Miss Mary Lou that he had to go the very next night and tell her so. Yes 'm."

Mrs. Posey's face wore its most shocked expression, and she was sitting very straight in her chair, forgetting to rock. "Well, I never," she said. "Ef that don't beat all! First to go into spiritualism, and then into speculation!! I don't know which is worse. And to talk about settin' an example! The hypocrite! That 's what he is! He 's a hypocrite!"

Mr. Willy was rocking gently, and smiling, and Mrs. Aaron continued: "What 's he got to speculate with, I 'd like to know?"

"Yes 'm," replied the letter-carrier, "that 's what puzzled him, first off. He said he jest had to cudgel his brains to

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find a way to get hold o' some money. Says it cert'n'y did seem to him that one o' the most mysterious movings o' Providence was that the very time you wanted money the most was the time you found it the hardest to get! Then he jest happened to remember that his guardian sperit seemed to know about as much as he did, and maybe it 'd have an idea; so he up and went to see Miss Boker again. Sure enough, the guardian sperit told him to 'paint, paint,' and that was all it *would* say. Says he thought so hard the next day he most wore himself all out, and found himself jest a-wanderin' here and there, tell suddenly he found himself in front of his first wife's Aunt Lucy's house. Zebedee V. says when he looked up at it, it jest made him feel sick to think how near he come to losin' that chance.

“That house had n't been painted for

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goodness knows how long, and his first wife's Aunt Lucy was always right easy to persuade, when you did n't do it too often. So in he went, and when he come out the old lady had advanced him a hundred dollars, and he was to have the house painted before winter come on, and after the flies left. That gave him time enough to look around — for he said of course he had n't any idea o' doin' the work himself, a-riskin' his life and limb on a scaffoldin' or a ladder, with a wife and eight dependin' on him. He thought he'd jest use the hundred dollars to buy margins, and when he had made his wealth he could easy pay a man, yes, or ten men, to do the paintin' in time."

"Margins!" exclaimed Mrs. Posey. "What's margins? I thought he was goin' to speculate in wheat!"

Mr. Willy rubbed his ear. "Yes'm,

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he is. I reckon that 's jest another name for it. Zebedee V. says all people buys, when they speculate in wheat, is margins."

"Hum," said Mrs. Aaron. "I don't think much o' your margins, myself. But Zebedee V. Slocum could n't be expected to show any common sense."

"Well," said Mr. Willy, unfailing in defense of his friend, "maybe he could n't; but he shows his gratitude to them that helps him. Said when he got a holt o' the money, the next thing was to get a holt of a broker; that 's a man what tells you what to bet on—I mean, what to buy. He said he would 'a' gone down to Balt'mer and reviewed the situation himself, but Flora does miss him so whenever he 's out of her sight for long. So he went to see Miss Mary Lou again."

"Anything for an excuse, I suppose," said Mrs. Aaron.

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“ I ain’t said so,” said Mr. Willy, slyly. “ Anyways, he told Miss Boker ef she would get him the name and address of a broker in Balt’mer, he ’d go halves with her on his profits. Said he wanted to show his gratitude to her for helpin’ him to know and appreciate his guardian sperit. And she did; she told him jest the very man to send to, and now he ’s waitin’ to see what comes of it — expectin’ a letter from the broker enclosin’ his wealth, most any day.”

Mrs. Aaron accompanied Mr. Willy Posey to the door. “ Yes,” she said, “ I reckon a small-sized letter can enclose all the wealth he ’ll get out of it.”

XI

Although Mrs. Posey was not aware of it, the months during which Mr. Slocum was making the acquaintance of his guardian spirit through the medium of Miss Mary Lou Boker were months of wild excitement in what Mr. Slocum himself would have called "the marts of trade." Stocks rose and fell in ways startling and unexpected to those who were not their manipulators, and sometimes to those who were; an Asiatic war cloud which was hovering over the horizon burst suddenly, and in the hurricane which followed, such staples as corn and wheat went soaring to altitudes seldom reached before. Miss Boker's friend was a young gentleman just entering upon the

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brokerage business; he was endowed with that beginners' luck so often heard of and so seldom met, and when Mr. Slocum's letter reached him —

But the postman told the news to Mrs. Aaron, one chilly afternoon in late September, after a week of rain, when he found her in the sitting-room, "looking over" Mr. Posey's socks.

"Good evenin', Cousin Annie Lee," he called out cheerily, as he opened the door. Mrs. Posey nodded pleasantly, and he made himself comfortable in his favorite rocker, rubbing his hands one over the other to warm them.

"Seems right quiet like around here now, don't it?"

Mrs. Aaron spread out the fingers of her left hand inside a sock, and finding no holes therein drew it off wrong side

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out. Mr. Willy seemed to expect an answer, so she peered at him questioningly over her spectacles.

He continued: "I reckon things 'll quiet down right smart, now that Miss Mary Lou Boker's gone home."

"Gone home!" exclaimed Mrs. Posey. "You don't say! Why, when did she go?"

"Yesterday mornin', first train down," Mr. Willy replied. "She went in a kind of a hurry at the last," he added, and smiled.

"High time!" sniffed Mrs. Aaron.

Mr. Willy chuckled. "You never said a truer word," he agreed. "Ef she had n't a-went when she did, I reckon she'd 'a' had undesired comp'ny. I jest tell you what it is, Cousin Annie Lee, it ain't always wise for the father of eight to be seekin' tests and sech like; it ain't

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every day things turn out as fortunate as they did this time."

Mrs. Posey was startled. "For goodness' sake, Cousin Willy, you don't mean to tell me that fool of a man had any idea of runnin' off with —"

"Oh, no," said Mr. Willy, hurriedly, "Zebedee V. ain't that kind of a man at all! And after a man's had three wives — well! Oh, no, it was n't him that was a-goin' with her." He laughed and slapped his knee. "No, ma'am! I tell you how it was. You remember how Zebedee V. was expectin' of a letter from Miss Mary Lou's friend the broker? Well, that was more 'n a month ago, that was, and he's been sneakin' in to the post-office every time he can, and laywaying me, too, to ask if they was n't ary letter for him. First he used to go to Miss Mary Lou's real often, to try to find

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out from his guardian sperit what was happenin' to his money; but Miss Mary Lou, she could n't seem to get the guardian sperit to communicate very often, and finally, Zebedee V. begun to feel kinder cool towards her. Well 'm, day before yest'd'y he stopped me every time he see me a-goin' by, and he cert'n'y was lookin' real anxious and bad. I cert'n'y did feel right sorry for him — Said his first wife's Aunt Lucy was a-clamorin' to have her house painted, and he'd jest about run out of excuses, and did n't know what he was goin' to do. Said he could n't see any way out of it, exceptin' death or the promised wealth, and Aunt Lucy seemed real hearty, and not likely to pass away.

“I cert'n'y was sorry for him. The last thing in the evenin' he come to the store, and said he reckoned he'd have one more try at his guardian sperit that night.

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Well 'm, you know we all don't distribute that seven-forty mail tell mornin'; but I had him on my mind so, and I felt so bad for him, that when it come in an' I found a letter in it for Zebedee V. Slocum, I jest could n't help takin' it to him. I took it mighty nigh on a run, too, not knowin' what I soon found out. I jest could n't help it. It did seem like it would be unchristian to leave him another night without his wealth. When I got there, Gladys Virginia come to the door, and I, never thinkin' he might n't be home, says I — 'Where 's yo' pa, honey? I got a letter for him,' says I. And then Mis' Slocum, she come out; and Mis' Slocum cert'n'y has got queer eyes. Anyways, I's so startled I dropped the letter before I could get it into my pocket, I's jest that dumfounded. I got a splinter under my nail a-pickin' it up, too. Mis' Slocum, she

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says — ‘What’s that you said?’ and I says, ‘Oh, nothin’, nothin’ at all.’ ‘Yes you did,’ says she, ‘you let me see that letter. My husband don’t have any secrets from me, Willy Posey,’ she said. I says I had to deliver that letter to him in person, and then Mis’ Slocum said — she said — oh well, anyways, I thought maybe it would be more peaceful like to give it to her, which I did, as graceful as I could; and then I went off in a hurry to warn Zebedee V.

“I thought it more’n likely I’d find him at Miss Boker’s a-communin’ with his guardian sperit, and sure enough they was a light in the parlor when I got there. At first Mis’ Julius Todd would n’t let me in; but I says to her, I says — ‘I jest tell you what it is, Mis’ Todd, ef you don’t let me in to where Zebedee V. Slocum is, they’ll be trouble in this neighborhood before

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long!’ Mis’ Todd said she would n’t dast disturb Miss Mary Lou whilst she was in a tranct, but ef I chose to stand by the consequences I could.

“ By that time I heard someone a-comin’ up the steps, and I jest had a presentiment who it was; so I reckoned I better make up my mind right quick to stand by them consequences, which I did. I opened the parlor door real easy like, and Miss Mary Lou was a-lyin’ on the lounge with a hankcher over her face, talkin’ in low tones, and Zebedee V. was a-kneelin’ down in front o’ the hair-cloth rocker Mis’ Julius Todd’s mother died in, a-wringin’ his hands, but lookin’ real pleased like. He was a-facin’ the door, and when he see me he waved his hands at me to go back; and then I saw his eyes sort o’ pop. Miss Mary Lou — or the sperit — was a-sayin’, ‘ Your guardian sperit says to have no

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fear. Trust in the angel heaven has provided for yo' guidance. Hearken to it as one havin' the voice of authority. It will tell you how to care for your wealth, for the wealth which is even now nigh at hand. Trust in —'

"That's all she got out, for Mis' Slocum, right behind me in the door said, in a awful loud tone of voice, 'Yes, I reckon she will! I reckon she'll tell him more than that! You get up off'n your knees, Zebedee V. Slocum! I'm glad to see you had the grace to let it be to a hair-cloth rocker, instead of to that decked-out creature there.' Miss Boker swung round and was a-sittin' on the sofa in a minute after she's interrupted; she cert'n'y did come out o' that tranct quicker'n usual. Mis' Slocum went up to her and said, 'Mr. Slocum and I are real grateful to you for givin' sech good advice,' she said. And

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then she waves the letter at Zebedee V. 'What part and parcel did that woman have in this?' she asked him; and he says, 'None, my love, none whatever. It was by the directions of my guardian sperit.' Mis' Slocum said, knockin' on the letter and glarin', 'How did you get hold of any money for this?' and Zebedee V. says, real dignifiedly, 'It was for Aunt Lucy's paint, my love.' Mis' Slocum ast him how much it was, and he told her a hund'ed dollars, and then Miss Slocum says, 'Do you mean to tell me that you made seventeen hundred dollars out o' one hundred?' Zebedee V. says, real scairt like, 'Seventeen hundred?' and she says, 'That's what this letter says; they's a check in it for seventeen hundred dollars!'

Mr. Willy paused dramatically. Mrs. Aaron gasped, "Well, I never!"

"Yes 'm," continued Mr. Willy, smil-

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ing, "It was the truth she was tellin'. That 's jest what it was! Zebedee V. set down in the rocker all of a heap like, and begun to fan hi'self with his hat; and Miss Boker, she begun to cry into her han'kcher. Yes 'm. It was jest like a play. I felt kinder stirred up like, myself! Mis' Slocum, she looked from one to the other of 'em, and then she said to Miss Boker, she said, 'I reckon this here friend of yours must be wantin' to see you right bad, don't you? Ef I was you I'd go down to Balt'mer on that first train to-morrer! Ef you don't, maybe you'd ruther go along with me on the ten-thirty! We are both much obliged to you for your good advice.'

"And then she took a holt o' Zebedee V. 'Here,' she says, 'you hearken to the voice of authority, and come along home with the angel heaven has provided for

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your guidance. She'll tell you how to care for your wealth. They ain't any doubt about that. I reckon she's about all the guardian sperit you'll need hereafter,' says she; and her and Zebedee V. up and walks out. I thought maybe I could n't do much good by stayin', either, so I come too. Yes 'm."

"Well I never!" said Mrs. Aaron.

XII

It was a vast amount of money to have descended upon an inhabitant of Pocahontas. Whether Mr. Willy spread the news, or whether it traveled in one of those mysterious wireless methods common to every countryside, it was only a very few days before all Pocahontas was fairly humming with it, and men drove in from the hills and from beyond the Susquehanna, just to get the precise facts. Mr. Slocum had been a hero before, from time to time; but now, while there still clung to him something of heroism, he had jumped into another and even more enviable class; he was a financier. People were shocked at the way he had made his money; but it is easy to be shocked at high finance

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without in the least disliking or disdaining the person using its methods. Then, to have made sixteen hundred dollars in speculation argued the possibility of making sixteen thousand, or sixty thousand, for that matter. Indeed, Zebedee V. was spoken of in the same breath with Mr. Carnegie and Mr. Morgan; nothing seemed beyond his powers.

That Mrs. Zebedee V. had gone off to Belair the morning of the fair spiritualist's departure and deposited the check for seventeen hundred dollars in the bank was a fact known only in the Slocum family, until Flora divulged it to Mrs. Aaron. For a few days Zebedee V., crushed by the ultimate developments, kept at home; but when he realized that the men knew only of his making the money, that Mr. Willy, the sole observer of the grand climax, had disclosed nothing

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of his crony's humiliation, that his remaining at home was supposed to be only the seclusion of the modesty that accompanies true greatness, then Zebedee V. went forth.

The winter before had witnessed the defeat of the Pocahontas Construction Company, and there had been other winters which he preferred to forget; but ah, how different was this one! He was a rich man, — a man whose voice was listened to with new respect; there might be Flora at home, but abroad he was a personage.

It never took Flora long to make her plans; the day after her trip to Belair she borrowed a horse from Mrs. Sissy Slocum, and drove out to call on Mrs. Aaron.

“Yes, it's all the truth,” she said, when

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they were comfortably rocking in Mrs. Posey's parlor. "I never suspicioned he's up to anything, till just a day or so before I got a hold of that letter with the check in it; and as things have turned out, I reckon it's jest as well I did n't. They was n't any real harm done; and maybe he even kept some of the young fellers away from that woman and so sent 'em back to their sweethearts. Which reminds me o' what I come to talk about. Have you seen the doctor lately?"

"He brought Zora up here one afternoon last week," said Mrs. Aaron. "Why?"

"Um-hum. That's jest it," Flora said. "It's Miss Zora this and Miss Zora that, and take Miss Zora here and take Miss Zora there, till the child's getting her head turned."

"She's eighteen," Mrs. Aaron stated.

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“And ain’t had a mite o’ girlhood,” the stepmother returned. “I ain’t got a bit of objection to the doctor; in fact, I’d rather Zora’d have him than anybody else around here; but land, that pore little thing! Why, she’s been a-working and a-working ever since she could toddle; I ain’t going to have her get married yet a while, not if I can help it.”

Mrs. Aaron took off her spectacles and smiled; Flora had such admirable, consistent common sense! “What to do?” she asked.

“Well, there’s that money,” said Flora.

They looked at each other for a minute or two; then Flora went on, “I don’t know a soul in the East here; I come to you to help me. I want to send the girl to Balt’mer or Washington, for the winter, to let her get a rest, and have a good time, and maybe pick up a little schooling

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or playing the pianner or something. And I don't know a soul in either place."

"Land, she can't very well go to school after she's eighteen," said Mrs. Posey.

"Why not?" demanded Flora. "Girls go to college. Zora don't know enough for that; but I been teaching her all summer and spring, and she's picked up faster 'n anybody I ever taught. I want her to go to school, or somewhere. I certainly don't want her to get married yet."

"Me neither," Mrs. Posey agreed.

The result of their afternoon consultation was that a distant Slocum cousin who lived in Baltimore was remembered and was written to; and a week or two later saw the half-willing Zora in the cousin's house, with the prospect of a winter of music lessons and good times. Mr. Slocum hated the scheme, and violently protested against it, until at last Zora, the

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most faithful and devoted of daughters, declared that she would stay at home forever rather than take any of poor Pa's money to spend on her worthless self. But common sense and Flora prevailed; Zebedee V. might sulk, but Zora should have her good time.

The doctor declared the scheme admirable; lovemaking had not progressed very far between the two, for Zebedora was only a child in heart and manner. The doctor was beginning pretty well to know his own mind; but he was a man, an ardent admirer of Mrs. Aaron and Mrs. Zebedee V., and heartily in favor of anything they might agree upon. So Zora went to Baltimore, and even to New York.

There was only one person who was secretly disquiet during that pleasant winter. None knew better than Zebedee V. that things are not always what they

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seem. At the store he was the bold, ingenious, successful financier and man of business; at home, Flora's husband and man-of-all-work. He knew that he was made to be a leader of men, not servant to the whims, however admirable, of a woman. He knew that he was meant to direct work, not to do it; he knew that the germs of greatness were imbedded in his nature; he knew that the misplaced energy of his wife was thwarting his true development. He made the most of his position at the store; but at home he was a different creature. In one way, the winter seemed to pass quickly, for the hours spent in other men's company were all too short and fleeting; but in another — how the days dragged, a year's length each! Even the children were beginning to lose something of their admiring wonder for him; and Zora, the daughter of

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his heart, was spending his fortune in wasteful idleness in the city! Her letters gave him things to boast about at the store; but all the while he remembered that it was his money she was spending, while the very sight of it was denied him.

So the winter wore away; and one bright, warm morning in April he came out of his well-ordered kitchen, glanced swiftly over his shoulder at the bustling, busy form of his wife, and stood irresolutely on his side porch. There was work to be done and plenty of it; Flora always saw to that. But work had never held a strong appeal for Mr. Slocum, and to-day, of all days, it loomed before him so uninvitingly as to be almost impossible. The call of the season was all about him, and the very atmosphere seemed weighted with something akin to his own lassitude. The sun was already warming the soft

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air, fragrant with the scent of blossoms and the sweet brown earth. Across the sky white puffs of cloud were floating, their cool shadows passing over the fields below. Pigeons were cooing among the eaves of the barn, and two bluebirds were calling from among the blossoms of a near-by cherry. A red-crested woodpecker, in his courting finery, flew down and alighted on the trunk of a big walnut tree.

Mr. Slocum had felt spring's appeal in years gone by; but now, ah! how much more poignantly! In other times, on such a day as this, he used to spend long restful hours on his side porch, with his feet on the railing, his pipe in his mouth, and peace in his heart; or perhaps he would stroll around his neighbors' fields to advise them in their planting, or to the store to watch the mail being distributed. But this year things were different.

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Now Zebedee V. no longer smoked, no longer dallied in the friendly store, no longer stayed out with his friends in the cool of the evening, no longer lounged in idle comfort on his side porch. The days spent in healthful, manly exercise seemed very long, the nights of rest only too short.

With the coming of spring and the yearning pain of the first warm days he had several times tried to escape; but his wife's parrot hung in the sunshine on the side porch, just above the spot where his feet used to rest on the railing; and it screeched whenever anyone entered or passed out of the front gate. So to-day he stood in irresolute longing only a minute, then went almost swiftly to his work back of the barn, and wearily lifted the emblem of labor. The very heaviness of his joints made it easier to press in the spade than to lift it.

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But spring is full of hope, and with an undefined feeling that there must be an end somewhere, he worked his way around the corner of the barn. The earth he turned over lay in irregular masses; here and there, where the spade made a cut through closely packed soil, a shining surface was upturned, reflecting iridescent rainbow tints. In one of his not infrequent pauses for rest, Mr. Slocum's eyes were attracted towards such a lump of earth, not alone by its prismatic hues, but by something more familiar, friendly — a fat, wriggling angle-worm, squirming its way out of the clod. He stooped over it, and chopped it with his spade; its wiggles increased; it fattened, then elongated. He raised himself warily, and looked across the fields to where a blur of emerald indicated the line of willows that bordered the brook; his memory recalled

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the trickle and murmur of the water, the restful satisfaction of fishing, the flavor of crisply fried gudgeon for breakfast. He peeped irresolutely around the corner of the barn towards the house; then, with another glance at the sky and the willows, he set his spade firmly upright in the earth, and as firmly walked out of his yard to the road. The parrot saw him and screeched; but Mr. Slocum's step did not falter. He walked on quickly towards the store.

But on that lovely day spring's appeal was making itself felt not only by Mr. Slocum. In the household of Mrs. "Sissy" Slocum the beauty of the season and its mildness had been commented upon at the breakfast table; and at noon the young schoolteacher who boarded there came home with a handful of buttercups

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and bluets — demure “ Quaker ladies ” — and a suggestion which was none the less pleasing because of its unusualness. So it happened that early in the afternoon a Dayton wagon drove into Mrs. Aaron Posey’s yard, and her sister, Mrs. Slocum, descended. Mrs. Posey, with a dish-towel in her hand, came to the door to meet her.

“ What ’s the matter? ” she exclaimed, explosively.

“ Sissy ” looked up in mild astonishment. “ Matter? ” she repeated.

“ Yes, matter! What ’s the matter? What ’s happened? Anybody been took? ”

“ Land, no! ” Mrs. Slocum reassured her. “ Nothin ’s the matter. We come to take you on a picnic.”

The alarm on Mrs. Posey’s face deepened. She looked towards the two women still seated in the Dayton — her youngest

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sister, Miss Julia Higgins, and the pretty schoolteacher. Miss Higgins called out, divining Mrs. Posey's suspicions — "It's all right, sister! We jest thought maybe you'd like to come on a picnic with us."

Mrs. Posey's expression changed; she began to look scandalized. "I never heard of such a thing," she said. "This ain't Fourth o' July."

The schoolteacher leaned out and said, sweetly, "I had to go out to get some specimens, Mrs. Posey, and we all thought we'd go on a little picnic, the day's so warm."

Mrs. Posey considered for several moments; then she said, firmly, definitely, finally, "It's Saturday."

For a moment it seemed as if that fact would of necessity kill the plans for the picnic; but Mrs. Slocum remarked, casually,

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“ I always get through *my* work in the mornin’s, Saturday or no Saturday.”

“ Well,” said Mrs. Posey, from the doorway, with tossing head, “ I reckon nobody gets through their work any quicker ’n I do! Mr. Posey ’s drove over to Joppa with the calf. Want me to bring along anything to eat? ”

“ We got a plenty,” replied Mrs. Slocum, and went back to her place in the Dayton.

XIII

It was not long before Mrs. Posey came out with a small wooden grape-basket in her hand. She locked the door and put the key on the window-sill, closing the shutters afterwards. "I never put *my* key under the door-mat, where everybody knows where to look for it," she said. "Here's some of my beat biscuit; I thought maybe they'd go real good."

"So they will," the schoolteacher tactfully declared. "I'm crazy about your beaten biscuit, Mrs. Posey."

"Thanks," replied Mrs. Aaron, but was evidently still to be appeased. "How come you got up a picnic this time o' year, please tell me?"

Miss Higgins entered the breach.

ZEBEDEE V

“Where d’you reckon is the best place for specimens, sister?” she tactfully asked, as they drove off.

Mrs. Aaron was fond of conversation, but she knew when to remain silent. The schoolteacher explained. “Yes, specimens of spring flowers and leaves; I want to get a craw-fish, too, if I can. I need them for school.”

“For gracious sakes!” exclaimed Mrs. Aaron, impatiently, “ef I had a child, which maybe it’s a blessin’ I have n’t, I reckon I’d be satisfied ef it got all the learnin’s to be had out of books, without foolin’ over weeds and reptiles.”

Mrs. Slocum spoke quickly, with peaceful intent. “I thought maybe down under the high culvert might be a good place to go.”

“Yes, and ef a train went over, the horse might get loose and run away,” said

ZEBEDEE V

Mrs. Posey. "I'd go to a quieter place, myself, since you're bound to tempt Providence by picnicking at this season of the year. Why don't you go down by 'Crick' Tom Wilkins's?"

"That's jest the very spot," decided Miss Higgins; and, indeed, "Crick" Tom's creek proved an ideal place for specimens and the picnic. The ladies found shade and soft grass, and many varieties of leaves and flowers; the afternoon passed pleasantly, and they were talking of going home, when the teacher remembered the craw-fish.

So they walked along beside the brooklet, turning over the smaller flat stones and poking under those too heavy to lift. Mrs. Aaron Posey directed the explorations, her skirts lifted high in both hands; Mrs. Slocum soon tired, and sat down on a mossy rock to rest, and the schoolteacher kept

ZEBEDEE V

near Mrs. Posey, from whom it was no easy matter to become detached; but Miss Higgins, with the freedom of a member of the family, did as she liked, and walked on ahead, stooping occasionally over a stone, or poking in the mud with a stick. She had turned a bend in the creek where the bordering willows and overhanging elders hid her from the others, when she was heard to emit a shrill cry, then a series of short, staccato shrieks.

The young teacher clutched Mrs. Posey's arm; but no emergency ever took Mrs. Aaron unawares. With skirts held higher she ran around the bend of the stream. Miss Higgins was standing with hands upraised and fingers separated, looking down at something on the ground. Mrs. Aaron quickly reached her sister's side, and exclaimed in a disgusted tone —

“For the land's sake, Julia, do have

ZEBEDEE V

some sense! The sight of a neckid boy ain't a-goin to kill you, at your age!"

Miss Higgins replied with a wail — "But they ain't a soul *in*, sister!"

The others had come up by this time, and all four surveyed the stretch of water before them. The creek here broadened to a considerable width, and its depth made the spot the favorite swimming-hole of many generations. From shade to shade the pool stretched, comfortably leaning trunks of trees overhanging the banks, its smooth surface unbroken save by breeze-blown ripples, by gently waving willow branches, and by one high, pointed rock which rose from near the center of the pool, and which had borne the imprint of many bare feet. Now, however, as Miss Higgins had said, there was no one in the pool; the clear water revealed no lurking small boy.

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But Mrs. Aaron Posey was not to be so easily alarmed as her maiden sister. "Well," she said, "here's the clo'es, and I reckon their owner ain't far off. You set down here and get over your scare, and I'll go upstream and find him. This ain't the time of year for any boy to be in swimmin'."

She marched off determinedly, every well-planted step expressing the time-honored disapproval of the matron for the swimming-hole. In a very few minutes, however, she returned in evident excitement, holding outstretched a long bamboo fishing rod with line attached, and a broad-brimmed hat of the sombrero type.

"Whose hat is this?" she demanded hoarsely, as soon as she was within speaking distance. The other women sat limply, staring at the things Mrs. Posey carried.

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Mrs. Aaron came closer, fairly stood over them, and repeated her question. Everyone recognized the hat; only one man in that vicinity was of sufficiently romantic turn to wear such headgear. There was really no need to answer Mrs. Posey's question, but Mrs. Slocum said, in a hushed, awe-filled voice,

“It's Zebedee V. Slocum's!”

Mrs. Aaron nodded. “That's jest whose it is,” she said. “And there's his clo'es. Now where's Zebedee V. Slocum? It ain't to be expected he's gone home with nothin' on!”

The four women looked at the swimming-hole, then at each other, with understanding and horror. Miss Higgins began to weep.

“This is what comes of advertisin' for a wife,” she sobbed.

Mrs. Slocum nodded. “And it ain't two

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year yet!" she said, in a shocked, hushed tone.

The young schoolteacher's face was very white. "Oh, you don't really suppose he's drowned himself?" she exclaimed, her voice quavering with fright and horror. "Oh, it is n't possible!"

"Pore soul, pore soul," sobbed Miss Higgins. "He might 'a' lived for years and been happy!"

"He must 'a' had a right smart to stand, before he got drove into doin' sech a deed as this," said Mrs. Slocum, shaking her head mournfully, and using the tone that Pocahontas considers proper in speaking of those deceased.

"Well," said Mrs. Aaron Posey, after a pause, "it's a marvel to me he'd work himself up to it, hatin' work as *he* did!"

"I would n't talk like that of the dead

ZEBEDEE V

ef I was you, Annie Lee," said Mrs. Slocum, in shocked protestation.

"Truth's truth, dead or livin'," declared Mrs. Aaron. "And I will say it's the decentest suicide I ever heard of. He picked out a quiet, secluded spot, where he could n't pollute anything, and he left his clo'es in a dry place. They'll cut over real nice for Jeromy Faunt le Roy. I cert'n'y would n't 'a' looked for as much as this from Zebedee V. Slocum. It's the first time I ever knew him to show any common sense about anything."

"Oh, sister, I don't see how you can talk like that," wailed Miss Higgins, "when the pore man's gone to his account!"

"That's a fact," admitted Mrs. Aaron. "I reckon the account'll be enough for him, too, without any testimony of ours."

ZEBEDEE V

But it ain't any use to stay here and talk about him."

Mrs. Slocum shook her head. "Somebody's got to break it to HER," she said.

"Yes, and somebody's got to come dredge," said Mrs. Aaron. "We better be goin', instead of wastin' time here."

Miss Higgins mopped her eyes, and stood up. "I'll get the minister to go pray with — HER," she said.

"For the land's sake," said Mrs. Posey, in a disgusted tone, "Flora Slocum would n't want that young feller floppin' around her any more'n I would. Go tell her yourself, and offer to get the children's supper, whilst she attends to things. She won't let you; but ef you got to ease yo' feelin's, that's about as harmless a way as any."

The schoolteacher was still pale and trembling. "Oh, do you think it is just

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right to leave the — the *body* here alone?" she asked timidly.

"It don't seem feelin'," Mrs. Slocum acquiesced, looking solemnly out at the quiet pool.

"Hum," sniffed Mrs. Posey, "I reckon it's safe enough where it is; but of course you won't do any harm waitin' here, ef you want to. I never believe in settin' up with a corpse, myself!"

"Oh, no," exclaimed the teacher, growing still paler, "I could n't do that; I *could n't* stay here *alone!* I thought maybe *you* would!"

Mrs. Aaron looked her indignation. "I never was one to stay behind when they's work to be done," she declared. "I could n't do a mite of good stayin' here."

Miss Higgins added her pleading note, and Mrs. Slocum said, "They ain't ary

ZEBEDEE V

one of us *could* stay, Annie Lee, and I do think somebody ought to. Nobody but *you* could stand it."

Mrs. Aaron stared at them for a moment, then seated herself on the ground with great precision, and spread her skirts around her. "I ain't afraid, ef that's what you 're drivin' at," she said. "You go on home, and tell Flora Slocum I'm here; and ef you see Mr. Posey tell him there's cold meat in the ice-chest."

The others prepared to go, and Miss Higgins turned for a farewell look at the swimming-hole, the watery exit of their old neighbor. At a choking gasp from her the others looked, too — and were held in mute, staring amazement.

The limpid pool was quiet as before; the shady banks still showed no signs of human life; waving green things had not ceased caressing the cool water. All these

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remained unchanged; it was towards the high rock which rose from near the middle of the swimming-hole that the ladies looked. Above the rock arose the dripping head and wet, hairy arms of a man. It was not the ghost of Zebedee V., but the face, well known to all of them, of Mr. Willy Posey. When they saw it daily as he drove around with their mail it was childishly fresh and rosy; now it was purply gray, and its teeth were chattering with cold. It reminded the school-teacher of a big, white bullfrog just climbing out upon a rock; she had seen many in just that position.

Mrs. Aaron Posey was the first to break the spell of silence which their surprise had thrown upon them. "What you doin' out there?" her voice rang over the waters.

"For Gawd's sake, Cousin Annie Lee,

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go home with them women and let us come outen here," chattered Mr. Willy.

Mrs. Aaron seldom missed the point at issue. "Where's Zebedee V. Slocum?" she demanded.

"He's down behind this here rock. Y-y-y-es 'm."

"Where's your clo'es?"

"B-b-b-ack yonder in the bushes," replied Mr. Willy, his elbows shaking with cold. "'Deed, ef you all don't let us outen here right quick, we cert'n'y will ketch our death of cold!"

Mrs. Aaron Posey arose without another word, and with skirts held high led the way back to the Dayton.

On the following afternoon of Sabbath quiet, while Mrs. Aaron was rocking and reading on her porch, and her husband was leaning comfortably back in his arm-

ZEBEDEE V

chair with his feet propped against the railing, the letter-carrier's well-known vehicle turned into the yard. Mr. Aaron called out a cheerful greeting, but his wife did not look up from her paper. The carrier descended, somewhat stiffly, brought from under the seat of his Day-ton a tin pail filled with shining small fish, and set it on the top step of the porch.

"Good evedid', Cousid Addie Lee," he ventured. "I thoughtd maybe you'd like some o' these gudgeod fo' yo' supper."

"Thank you," said Mrs. Aaron, with great dignity. "I don't believe in cookin', Sunday evenin's."

"They'll be jest as good fo' breakfast, Willy," said Mr. Aaron, with a sympathetic wink at his cousin. "You seem to caught cold. Seen Zebedee V. to-day?"

Mr. Willy smiled. "I reckon he must 'a' god a liddle cold yesterday, too, some-

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ways. I heard Jeroby sayid' 'at Mis' Slocum 's a-keepid' his pa id bed, all poulticed up."

The two men grinned understandingly at each other, but Mrs. Posey's paper did not so much as tremble.

"They 's a righd smard o' comfort id stayid' single," said Mr. Willy. "I reckod I bedder be goid'!"

XIV

One afternoon of early June, when the letter-carrier opened the door into Mrs. Aaron Posey's sitting-room, he found her apparently dressed for a drive. The strings of her second-best straw bonnet were hanging over her shoulders, and she was busily packing some delicacies into a small fancy basket.

"Why, good evenin', Cousin Annie Lee," he chirped. "Goin' out?"

"Yes," replied Mrs. Posey, in a pre-occupied tone. "I'm a-goin' to take somethin' to old Miss Lucy White. I don't suppose she'll be able to eat it, and I certainly do hate to think maybe I'm feedin' Zebedee V. Slocum; but I suppose I ought to show her some little attention before she goes."

ZEBEDEE V

“ I reckon you ought to done it a little mite sooner,” said Mr. Willy. “ She ’s gone.”

Mrs. Aaron turned quickly about to face him. “ You don’t say! Well, I never! And here I got all this stuff on my hands! When did she die? ”

“ Died last night,” said Mr. Willy.

“ Easy?” queried Mrs. Aaron.

“ Real easy,” replied Mr. Willy.

“ Well, it ’s a marvel, then — dogged like she ’s been by Zebedee V. Slocum. If I ’d been in her place, I ’d ’a’ found some way to get him out of my house whilst I was dyin’, I know that.”

“ Oh well, now, Cousin Annie Lee, Zebedee V. ’s been real kind to her, he certainly has; and she was n’t any sure enough kin to him, neither — jest his first wife’s aunt.”

“ Kind!” scoffed Mrs. Posey. “ Kind!

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Oh, yes, he was kind, was n't he? Got all he could squeeze out of her whilst she's livin', and hangin' around closer 'n a brother to get all he could when she died! Oh, yes, he was kind, was n't he? I reckon most men'd be kind to the goose that lays the golden egg, ef they had one."

"'Deed, Cousin Annie Lee," remonstrated Mr. Willy, "you certainly do mis-judge Zebedee V. I never can see what makes all the ladies so down on him," he sighed.

"Hum!" ejaculated Mrs. Aaron.

"Well, I don't," reiterated Mr. Willy. "I drove by there this mornin', and seein' the black on the door-knob, I knew she'd passed away; so in I went to see ef I could do anything. Zebedee V. was settin' at her desk, lookin' over some of her papers, and when he saw me a-comin' in,

ZEBEDEE V

he jest had to wipe the tears from his eyes, he felt so bad. Yes 'm."

"Hum!" said Mrs. Aaron, again.

"Yes 'm, he did," Mr. Willy insisted. "And ef you 'd a-heard him talkin', you 'd never be doubtin' the sincerity of his grief. He sat there mighty sorrerful like, a-tellin' me all about the deceased, and wipin' away the tears from his eyes every oncet in a while with his pocket hankcher. 'Course I know 't he don't unbosom himself to eve'body same as he does to me, but it certainly did make me feel real bad to hear him go on so. Yes 'm."

"I suppose he 's a-goin' to manage the funeral?" suggested Mrs. Aaron.

"Yes 'm," said Mr. Willy. "He says he would n't be the one to fail in any observance of what 's right and seemly towards his first wife's Aunt Lucy. Says pore Lucy was a faithful, lovin' spouse,

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and she certainly did think a heap of her Aunt Lucy that she was named after. Said she's always anticipatin' her Aunt Lucy would do well by her, and it was n't anybody's fault that she died too soon to enjoy the fruits of her expectations. Said it was only what's due to pore Lucy's mem'ry for him to enjoy 'em now twofold, for *himself* and her too."

"I reckon that's the way he'd enjoyed 'em ef Lucy was a-livin', likewise," said Mrs. Aaron. "Ef Zebedee V. Slocum's common sense was equal to his powers of enjoyment, he'd be a long sight better off then he is now. What'd he say about the funeral?"

"Well'm, I reckon he's goin' to have it real handsome. He says it certainly would look downright ungrateful not to do the best possible by the remains, when her that's departed was known and noted

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for her generous sperit. Says he wants to have the best of everything. Goin' to have ten hacks come up from Balt'mer, and a hearse with feathers on it. Says he wants to mark Aunt Lucy's mem'ry with all the elegance possible, and show the people of Pocahontas what a funeral can be like, when them that 's left behind has feelin's of deep respect and reverence for the departed, not to mention gratitude for the wealth and blessin's incidentally bestowed, as in this case. Yes 'm."

"Ten hacks from Balt'mer!" exclaimed Mrs. Aaron Posey. "I must say I think the Daytons and carriages hereabouts would do jest as good. I don't believe in introducin' new fashions like that into the community, makin' other people want to go and do the same when their time comes. I don't call *that* a proper sperit."

"Well, Z. V. 's got proper sperit. He 's

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chuck full of it. He showed me the poetry he put in the 'Sun Paper' with the funeral notice, too, and it certainly is elegant. I took a copy of it," said Mr. Willy, drawing a piece of paper from his pocket-book. "Here it is.

'The one we loved is gone at last,
Into the dimness of the past.
How can we fail our aunt to miss,
Although she's treading realms of bliss?
But well we know that we shall see
'All those we loved for eternity.

By her loving nephew,
ZEBEDEE V. SLOCUM.'

Z. V. says the minister helped him with the last two lines, and they don't jest exactly represent his sentiments. Says he loved each and all of his wives with deep affection, but he certainly did think it was askin' a good deal of a man to take upon himself sech earthly cares for all eternity.

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But howsoever, he would n't hurt the minister's feelin's by leavin' 'em out. Yes 'm."

"Well, it 'll cost a lot to put it in the paper. I reckon Zebedee V. Slocum must have mighty good reasons for spendin' that much money," said Mrs. Aaron. "Did he say whether the funeral was directed by the will?"

"No 'm, he ain't opened the will as yet. Said he never did think it was right to pry into the secrets of the dead until the funeral was over; and anyway, Mr. Abel Brown has the will in his safe, and Aunt Lucy had wrote on the outside in her own handwritin', 'Not to be opened till after my funeral.' Says he did go so far as to suggest to Mr. Abel Brown that it might have somethin' inside by way of directions, but Mr. Abel Brown said he reckoned he might 's well see that Aunt Lucy's directions on the outside was carried out

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before they troubled to hunt for any on the inside. Yes 'm."

"I 'm glad he met his match for once," declared Mrs. Aaron. "Is the time set?"

"Ten o'clock, Friday. I reckon it 'll be real handsome. Yes 'm," said Mr. Willy, and took his departure with an air intended to convey an impression of sympathy and sadness, tempered by a pleasant anticipation.

XV

But even Mr. Willy Posey's expectations of the funeral were more than realized. Circumstances had not often favored Mr. Slocum with so fine a chance to display his powers of invention and his love of the spectacular. For once his fine imagination was given free rein, and his own enjoyment of it was exceeded only by the results achieved. Such lugubrious evidences of grief had been seen in Pocahontas never before; the funeral might have been the final burial of all that life held dear for Mr. Slocum, so marked were the evidences of his sorrow.

The guests who drove into the yard in Daytons and buggies were put into a proper frame of mind at once, and into

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some state of wonderment as well, by the very gate-posts themselves; for these were swathed in black, and over them had been erected an arch, also with sable drapings, surmounted by a pole from which a flag at half mast hung limply. The ten hacks from Baltimore were drawn up in line at one side of the house, so placed that every shining wheel showed to best advantage. The plumed hearse, a novelty hitherto undreamt of in Pocahontas, stood in front of the porch, and the guests were obliged to walk around it in order to mount the steps. The pillars of the porch were twined in black, and every shutter was closed tightly, throwing the interior into mournful gloom. Zebedee V. fairly reveled in the funeral details. Flora, unused to Maryland's burial manners, only mildly remonstrated; she would not for worlds hurt the feelings of her kindly neighbors, and if that was

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the way they were used to having funerals, as her husband assured her it was, she felt bound to acquiesce in the arrangements. But still she marveled; and when Zora came home in new black, and gave no evidence of surprise at the grandeur of the display, Flora, though puzzled and a little shocked, did no more than go around with tightly shut lips and a disapproving air. Her husband told Mr. Willy Posey in private that Flora seemed scared of the expense, and *that* after having frittered away so much of his good money on Zeb-edora, and with a goodly amount remaining in the bank, and dead Aunt Lucy's will unopened.

When the people coming from the light outside became accustomed to the darkness within, they could not fail to note that the arrangements there were as impressive as those without. Mr. Willy

ZEBEDEE V

Posey was a pall-bearer, and Mrs. Aaron sat between Mrs. Julius Todd, with whom she was not on speaking terms, and Mr. Lewis Cary, who was stone deaf; so that it was not until she was in her own Dayton with Mr. Posey and her two sisters for companions that she could relieve her feelings by speech. Then, having driven through the black-swathed arch and under the sad-looking flag, she drew a deep breath, and said:

“Well! Well, I never! If that did n’t beat anything I ever saw in all my born days!”

Mrs. Sissy Slocum always cried at funerals; now her eyes and the tip of her nose were very red: The minister’s remarks had been most impressive. She was leaning back comfortably, prepared to enjoy the drive to the cemetery; in one hand she held her handkerchief, in the other a

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small black fan, and both hands were resting on her well-rounded lap.

“It was real handsome,” she said, with a dolorous shake of her head and tears in her voice. “I don’t know’s I ever saw anything handsomer than that piller of purple everlastin’ with ‘Aunt’ in white chrysanthé’ums. It’ll wear well, too. I always say it pays to get the best.”

“Handsome!” exclaimed Mrs. Posey, scornfully. “Handsome *I* say! Jest nothin’ but show. That’s what it was; it was show. You can call it handsome, but I call it show.”

“It certainly was managed real well, sister,” Miss Julia Higgins suggested, peacefully.

“I don’t know what you call managed,” retorted Mrs. Aaron. “Whoever made out that list for the undertaker had mighty queer ideas o’ management, to my way of

ZEBEDEE V

thinkin'. The idea, the very idea, of callin' out Mis' Julius Todd's name before mine! It ain't that I care a mite, as anybody might have sense enough to know; but when it comes to makin' a effort to do things right, I always say they ought to be *done* right. I been President of the Ladies' Aid eleven times, and Mis' Julius Todd's never so much as had a vote, to my knowledge. I don't mean to hold myself above even the meanest of the Lord's creatures, but there's such a thing as havin' proper respect showed you. I don't know what you call managed."

The long procession had reached a turn in the road, and the hearse and some of the hacks could be seen plainly around the bend. They suggested to Miss Julia a discreet change of subject.

"Did you notice who's in the hacks, sister?" she asked.

ZEBEDEE V

“ Hacks! Hacks!” said Mrs. Posey, with a jerk of her head which sent even her well-placed bonnet awry. “ I reckon I did notice who went in the hacks. It took three for the family, and three for the minister and the pall-bearers; that left four. Maybe Zebedee V. Slocum can explain it to himself how he arranged them four hacks, but it’s more’n *I* can!”

Mrs. Slocum looked interested at once, and her gloom perceptibly lightened. “ Did n’t he put Cousin Hanson Brown and Mr. Julius Todd in the same one?” she asked.

The three women looked at one another intently, with meaning glances and shakes of the head.

“ Land!” exclaimed Miss Higgins. “ What d’ you reckon ’ll happen?”

“ They ain’t never spoke sence the last

ZEBEDEE V

minister come, have they?" asked Mrs. Slocum.

"No, they ain't;" said Mrs. Aaron, "and I must say I think Cousin Hanson Brown was jest in the right. I never can see the use of callin' a young unmarried man into a community when you can get a man of family for the same money. It's jest invitin' a disturbin' element, that's what it is."

"Oh, well," said Mrs. Slocum, always ready to pacify, "this young man's two years'll be up come November, and I reckon they won't be any harm done. Goodness knows, they ain't much chance of a man with a chin like his and that kind of spindly legs a-breakin' very many hearts. I ain't seen any evidences of anything of the sort, and I reckon we'd know it ef there had been."

"I think Mr. Bean makes real fine

ZEBEDEE V

prayers," said Miss Julia Higgins, with unusual dignity, "and I reckon love 'd be blind to his limbs and his chin, Sister Sissy."

Mrs. Posey turned towards her quickly. "For goodness sake, Julia, do have some sense. Ef you was to talk like that before folks that did n't know what family you belonged to, they 'd think it was *you* Cousin Hanson Brown had in mind. For my part, as I said, I think he 's jest right to prefer a married man with a woman to manage him. If Mis' Julius Todd had a little mite of common sense, her husband 'd a show a little more of it, I reckon."

"Did n't they put Unc' Lewis Cary in the hack with 'em?" pursued Mrs. Slocum.

"Yes, they did," said Mrs. Posey. "I reckon they thought he 'd play peace-maker, though how 's he to do it when he

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can't hear a word, is more 'n I can see. And Little Hanse went in with 'em. Much good he'll do; anybody that lets himself be led around by Zebedee V. Slocum like him."

"Did their hack go next to the family?" asked Mrs. Slocum.

"Family! I reckon it did n't! It went ahead of the family, that's what it did. I suppose he had it that a way to show that he did n't claim no kin with the Whittles. Willy Whittle was own second cousin to Miss Lucy's father, and even if they do live over to Joppa and could n't get to see her often, they was family, a good deal more 'n Zebedee V. Slocum is, and ought to 'a' been put next. I felt real bad for Mis' Whittle; she looked like she felt it."

"She had on real elegant black, too," said Miss Julia.

ZEBEDEE V

“ And then, to put Mis’ Frank Slocum and Mis’ William Cary together, and leave two empty seats in the hack! It ain’t that I want to push where I ain’t wanted, but I do think a body has a right to what ’s due ’em. Goodness knows, it would n’t be pleasant with them two, for they has n’t been any love lost between ’em since Mis’ William Cary heard Mis’ Frank Slocum tellin’ Flora over the telephone how she was goin’ to have her fall bonnet trimmed, an’ Mis’ William Cary come out in church with one jest like it before Mis’ Frank Slocum could get hers done. I would n’t want to be in any hack with either one of those women. I would n’t trust ’em.”

Mr. Posey spoke for the first time. “ I reckon they could n’t do much to harm you in a hack,” he said.

“ Oh,” returned his wife. “ Maybe ef

ZEBEDEE V

Zebedee V. Slocum knew your feelin's he 'd put you in with 'em. There! Look at that! If that man has n't got a flag-pole planted at the grave! Is that crape tied on to it?"

XVI

The funeral was long remembered in Pocahontas, and not alone for its unusual magnificence and the ten hacks. Mr. Slocum's arrangements of the people within them had curious effects on the social life of the place for several months thereafter. Nor was it to Mr. Slocum alone that his first wife's Aunt Lucy's will was a matter of great interest; its provisions gave no deeper satisfaction to anyone than to Mrs. Aaron Posey.

The afternoon of the day following the funeral the letter-carrier was late in reaching the last house on his route. Mrs. Posey had planned to invite him to stay to supper, and was mixing biscuits when he came in.

ZEBEDEE V

“Why, good evenin’, Cousin Annie Lee,” he exclaimed, quite with the air of never having said it before. “How d’ you feel after the funeral?”

“It was n’t my funeral,” declared Mrs. Aaron. “How ’d you think I ’d feel?”

Mr. Willy Posey looked a little startled, and paused uncertainly in the middle of the room. “Ma’am?” he asked.

“Set down,” said Mrs. Aaron. “I never could bear to have a body gairp at me.”

So Mr. Willy obediently sat down, and was soon rocking vigorously. Mrs. Aaron continued her preparations for supper. The day had been rainy, and Mr. Aaron Posey had busied himself outside, waiting, as he expressed it, until “the old lady worked off her mad”; but it often takes more than the gentle flight of time to soothe an outraged dignity.

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Mr. Willy was well aware of his cousin's unusual perturbation; he had known Mrs. Aaron many years, and no one was more familiar with her moods, unless it were Mr. Aaron himself. Mr. Willy spoke:

"Zebedee V. ain't feelin' ve'y well to-day." Mrs. Aaron banged the oven door. "Ef I was Mis' Slocum I'd be real worried about him."

"I reckon you would," said Mrs. Aaron, "but by the grace o' Providence there's one member of that family's got some common sense."

"Yes 'm," said Mr. Willy, "I reckon they is. But I dunno but I'd ruther have a little sympathy in a wife, ef I had to have one, instead of all common sense. Zebedee V. don't get his share o' sympathy in this world; that he don't."

"Don't he?" asked Mrs. Aaron, with

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emphasis. "That 's a pity. He seems to get most everything else he wants."

"No, ma'am, he don't," said Mr. Willy, "and he certainly did work mighty hard over that funeral."

"I understood that nobody ast him to," said Mrs. Posey.

"No, ma'am; but Z. V. always does the best he can for everybody, dead or livin'; and he surely did work hard over that funeral. I 's talkin' to him night before; we sat up together with the corpse. He certainly did feel bad. Said his first wife's Aunt Lucy had been a mighty good friend to him and his'n, and it filled him with grief to think that he had n't her to go to any more. Said he never would be able to spend any of her money without thinkin' how his first wife loved her, and how kind she was to everybody. Said he hoped he 'd prove himself worthy of the

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trust about to be imposed in him; and as for the funeral, he had done his pore best to make it worthy of the departed. Said he reckoned they 'd be some to criticise, and even Flora had n't spoke scarcely a word to him sence he went to his Aunt Lucy's house to take care of her in her last illness; but he could n't fail to understand that, with his knowledge o' women. Said Flora was as good a wife as she knew how to be, but he reckoned it would be past human nature for a woman not to feel some slight qualms of jealousy when her husband showed sech mo'nin' for his first wife's aunt. Said he felt for Flora under the circumstances, but he owed it to the late lamented to show his sorrer."

"Well, he showed it," said Mrs. Aaron.

"Yes 'm," admitted Mr. Willy. "Grief

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comes hard to a sensitive nature like Zebedee V.'s; and likewise disappointment."

"Disappointment!" scoffed Mrs. Posey. "If Zebedee V. Slocum had any common sense he'd 'a' known he was layin' up trouble for himself, the way he fixed the people in them hacks."

"He's tellin' me about that," said Mr. Willy. "Said he thought they was one occasion when the petty differences that's bound to arise in a community had ought to be overlooked, and for his part he's real glad of the opportunity to show that he had n't any hard feelings towards none, and did n't take sides. So he fixed the people in his hacks so's they'd have a chanct to talk peaceable like, and show a Christian sperit in the presence of death. Yes 'm. It certainly was fine to hear him talk, in the still hours of the night. Might 'a' been a minister himself."

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“Hum!” said Mrs. Aaron. “Nobody ever accused Zebedee V. Slocum of not bein’ able to talk.”

“Yes ’m,” said Mr. Willy. “And it certainly does seem hard that anybody with sech noble feelin’s should be shocked and disappointed like the way he’s been. Yes ’m.”

“Hum! What shocked him?” asked Mrs. Posey.

“Miss Lucy,” replied Mr. Willy, feelingly. “He’s tellin’ me about it, with tears of sorrer in his eyes. He went home with Mr. Abel Brown right after the funeral, because he thought it was n’t right to leave the affairs of the dead in a state of uncertainty any longer’n was necessary. Says Mr. Abel Brown got Miss Lucy’s will outen his safe, and they drove back to her house to read it. He said they found Flora and the children and

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the Whittleses a-settin' there waitin' for 'em — all except Flora, and she was puttin' the house in order while the rest set around. Said it made him sick to think of anybody bein' as curious as them Whittleses, and that if he 'd 'a' been in their place he certain'y would n't 'a' presumed on relationship like that. Said he had the kind of sensitive nature that always knows when it ain't wanted, but he supposed the good Lord knew what he's about in makin' people different ways."

"I thank my stars He did," said Mrs. Posey.

"Yes 'm," said Mr. Willy, and winked at his Cousin Aaron. "Well 'm, I certainly did feel real bad for Zebedee V. when he told me about the will. Said Aunt Lucy left ten dollars apiece to each and all of the children, and a hundred to

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Flora, which touched his heart more 'n he could say, seein' Flora was n't a mite of kin to her. Said he jest had to ponder on what a generous nature hers was, not to show any jealousy to her thet sat in the place of his first wife, which was Miss Lucy's own niece. Said he hoped it was a rebuke and a warnin' to Flora's jealous nature. Then the will left all of Miss Lucy's clo'es and personal effects to the Whittleeses, and he said he thought that was no more 'n right an' proper, after all, and showed good sense on his Aunt Lucy's part; for he and his would n't demean her mem'ry by appearin' in half-used things after her leavin' her wealth to him. Then the will went on to say that to her well-beloved nephew, Zebedee V. Slocum, she left as a free gift all the debts he owed her, of whatever kind and amount they might be. He says he felt real touched by that,

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thinkin' it showed Aunt Lucy's desire to start fair and square with him, so 't he could enjoy the fullness of her bequest. And he felt still more kindlier to her when the will went on to say that she wished to leave him the greatest pleasure that she could, and she well knew he would see to it that her funeral was of the best, and how he 'd enjoy managin' it; and therefore she left him the full amount of the expenses of her funeral, howsoever great they might be, with her blessin' and thanks; and the rest of her estate she left to the Meth'dist Church. Yes 'm. Zebedee V. says he reckons it'll take many years to restore his shattered faith in human nature. Yes 'm."

"Well!" exclaimed Mrs. Aaron, standing still beside the table, a plate of hot biscuits in one hand and the coffee-pot in the other. "Well, I never! ef that ain't

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the greatest thing I ever heard! Now ain't it a shame that folks can't will away some of their good common sense! Miss Lucy had some to spare!" She set the plate of steaming biscuits on the table with a thump. "Supper's ready," she said, cheerfully. "Set up your chairs."

XVII

Mrs. Aaron Posey had the rheumatism. She was perfectly sure she caught cold at Miss Lucy White's funeral, and so blamed all her suffering on Zebedee V.; even when Zebedee V.'s daughter came up to look after her, her affection for the girl was not as keen as her indignation against the father.

"It was n't enough," she peevishly declared to Zora, "for your Pa to set half the people of Pocahontas by the years, and make a laughing stock of himself into the bargain; here I got the rheumatics in consequence of the length of those funeral services. Serves me right for being a dumb fool, I suppose, and following after any of his leadings!"

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Zora flushed so prettily that it was really a pity the doctor was not there to see. "Pa did his very best, Mis' Posey," she said, "and if you're going to talk that way about him I won't stay here, that's all!"

"Highly-tighty!" Mrs. Aaron began, ready to fan her indignation into a fine fury; but before she could get any farther Zora threw herself into her arms, in a storm of tears, regardless of Mrs. Aaron's aches. It had taken only the small excitement to unnerve her.

"Why, why!" Mrs. Aaron exclaimed, and was never more surprised in her life than when she found herself soothing and kissing and petting the sobbing girl. "Why, Zora, darlin' little child, what's the matter with you? Don't you know well enough I wouldn't hurt your feel-

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ings for all the rheumatics in the world? Why, Zora!"

Zora's arms were almost choking Mrs. Posey's ample neck; in response she hugged all the harder. "It ain't that, it ain't that," she cried. "I'm so sorry for my Pa! I — I'm so so-o-or-ry for my Pa — and for myself too!"

"For the land's sakes!" was all poor bewildered Mrs. Posey could get out. But the flood-gates of Zora's pain and indignation had been opened.

"I love Ma, I l-l-love her; I did n't want to love her, but I do! I love Pa, too, and I've been l-l-oving him the longest. I know Ma's right in everything she d-d-oes. I know I'm the m-m-most ungrateful thing that ever lived; but — I wish —"

"There, there," said Mrs. Aaron. "Of course you love your Pa best! Land sakes, he ain't jealous, is he?"

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Zora shook her curls, and gave Mrs. Posey's neck another squeeze. "N-n-no! Not that I know of! He need n't be. I reckon it's m-m-me that's jealous, or s-s-something! I'm — I'm a regular d-d-devil, I'm so wicked!"

Mrs. Posey jumped; she was thoroughly shocked! "Zora! Zora Slocum! How dare you say such a word's that! Ain't you ashamed of yourself?"

"Y-y-yes 'm," poor Zora cried. "Dreadful ashamed. You don't know how awful it is to f-f-feel you're — that!"

"Better feel it than say it," said Mrs. Aaron, sternly, "and you thinking about joining the Church, too! That's what comes of associating with Ze —" she remembered just in time.

Zebedora went on; it was evident that she had reached that feminine state of mind where she must confide in someone

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or perish. "M-m-ma sent me to Balt'-mer, and gave me the l-l-love-liest clo'es, and the children, too; and I know all she d-d-does is for the b-best; but oh! I do wish she would n't do it!"

"Would n't do what's best?" Mrs. Aaron's common sense was scandalized, but again Zora bobbed her curls into Mrs. Aaron's neck.

"Um-hum. I jest wish she'd let us be the way we were before she m-m-married poor Pa!"

"My land!" Mrs. Aaron could think of nothing else to say.

"It's — it's jest awful of me; that's why I said I was a regular — *you* know! But I do wish it! I like my new clo'es, especially the pink ones; and I reckon Pa likes the looks of the place. B-b-but — I — I don't want to have a young girl's life! They's — they's other things I'd rather d-d-d-oooo!"

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And, in a torrent of tears, Zora's secret was out. In her relief Mrs. Aaron smiled, slowly, grimly at first, then very tenderly. After all, Mr. Aaron was still the light of her eyes; she had never forgotten what happened twenty years before, and to her he had never grown older or stouter than the handsome youth who had courted her.

After a while, when the girl was lying quieter in her arms, she said, "Zora, honey, don't you be impatient. Yo' Ma knows all about it, honey, and so do I. They's two kinds of good times; maybe more! Anyways, they's two; and you might as well finish up with one before you begin the other; 'cause you can't have both at one and the same time!"

"I don't want both," Zora was youthfully positive.

"Hum," said Mrs. Aaron. "Well, you run out to the barn and talk to Mr. Posey,

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and get the red outen your eyes before the doctor comes, honey; maybe he 'll take you to ride!"

So the kindly soul arranged matters as kindly souls have always done, and fortunately always will; but when, a few days later, Flora heard that she was really ill enough to have the doctor, she found that she could no longer do without her young stepdaughter, and Zora was sent for. Thereafter Mr. Posey did his best to make his wife comfortable; but patience was not her greatest virtue, and when she could no longer endure his fussy, awkward, well-intentioned ministrations, she sent him off to notify her sisters of her illness, and to ask Julia to come keep house for her until the rheumatism passed and she was able to be about again.

She felt greatly relieved when she heard

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the sound of wheels in the yard, and immediately began to plan out the neglected house-work. But to her surprise it was Mrs. Sissy who came in, and not Miss Julia.

Mrs. Slocum was wearing an air of great solemnity and her best bonnet, as if she had come prepared for a long stay and expected to get out only on Sundays. Mrs. Aaron attributed the manner to her own state of health, and was not cheered thereby. She moved uneasily, and exclaimed with sharp impatience,

“For the land’s sakes, Sissy, don’t look at me that a way! I ain’t dead yet, nor near it. You know as well as I do that our family never dies of the rheumatics, and we all have ’em!”

Mrs. Slocum was standing in front of the bureau; she removed her bonnet, and began to roll the strings into neat little

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bundles, to keep them from wrinkling. She sighed.

"Where's Julia?" demanded Mrs. Aaron. "I sent for Julia!"

Again Mrs. Slocum sighed; she shook her head, and said, "I thought maybe I better come myself."

Evidently there was something mysterious in the tone of her voice. Mrs. Aaron tried to sit up in bed, but winced with pain. "What's the matter?" she demanded. "Julia ain't took too, is she?"

Mrs. Slocum laid her bonnet in the third bureau drawer, before she answered. "Yes, she is," she then replied. "And she's took bad."

Mrs. Aaron lay back with a groan. "Now ain't that the way?" she said. "Ain't that the way? Did you ever know one child in a family comin' down with the measles and the others not ketchin' "

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it? Now here jest because I'm laid up and can't move, Julia's got to come down with somethin', too. Land! I declare to goodness I can't see why things happen the way they do in this world."

"It ain't the measles she's got, Annie Lee," said Mrs. Slocum, slowly and solemnly, "nor yet the rheumatics. To be sure, one disease belongs to youth and the other to old age, and you might well think she's in her teens or in her dotage, the way she's a-goin' on."

"Plenty has rheumatics that ain't old," snapped Mrs. Posey. "What's the matter with *her*?"

Mrs. Slocum pulled up a small rocking chair beside Mrs. Posey's bed, and began to rock rather nervously. There are few better barometers than a rocking chair well used. "She's in love," she said.

Mrs. Posey was stunned for a moment.

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Then she exclaimed, "I got to get up. I got to get up — I can't stay here in this bed doin' nothin' with that goin' on."

"You might's well make yourself easy," said Mrs. Slocum. "I've said and done all and everything a body can, and I might's well 'a' saved my breath, for all the good it done."

"How 'd you find it out?" asked Mrs. Posey.

"Well, I went to open the winder shutters in the settin'-room the other mornin' before she's up. They was a folded piece of blue paper stuck in the blind. I don't suppose it's necessary for me to explain that I never for one minute thought of it's bein' a love letter, natchelly. So I opened it to see what's inside. It was verses. Verses, Annie Lee! Not Bible verses, neither. Pomes! I was a-readin' 'em, real puzzled like, when Julia come a-run-

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nin' down the stair, and snatched the paper outen my hand, and began to carry on something dreadful. Said I was spyin' on her, and readin' her letter, and sech like. I must say, I come near gettin' real mad. I cert'n'y did. Me spyin' on her!"

"High time, I should think, if you were!" said Mrs. Aaron, sympathetically. "Pomes! I never would 'a' thought it of one of our family. What else happened, Sissy?"

"Well, you 'd think she 's sixteen, from the way she takes on. I reckon I cared as much for Mr. Slocum as most girls cares for their beaux, but I'm mighty sure *I* never made such a fool of myself over any man, as Julia does."

"That 's always the way," said Mrs. Aaron, pessimistically. "A married woman has to grow common sense for

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two, but I have yet to see the old maid with a mite of it."

"Julia always was soft," admitted Mrs. Slocum. "But I did think she had had time to get over it."

"Who is the object?" asked Mrs. Posey.

"I should think you'd know without askin'," Mrs. Slocum replied. "They ain't but four unmarried men in Pocahontas, and you might know it ain't Mr. Willy Posey, nor Little Hanse Brown, nor yet Crick Ned Wilkins, who's still a-hidin' himself away because of the lost love of his youth."

Mrs. Posey thought for a moment; then she started, clucked, and looked sharply at her sister. "Sissy," she said, sternly, "you don't mean to tell me it's the minister?"

Mrs. Slocum nodded. "Yes, it is."

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For a few minutes Mrs. Aaron's feelings were stronger than her powers of utterance. Mrs. Slocum went on: "It's the minister. That's jest exactly who it is."

"Well," said Mrs. Posey, "a body cain't rightly object to his perfession, I suppose; but to think of a Higgins a-fallin' in love with that little spindly-legged, weak-chinned, yeller-haired man like the minister is almost more than flesh can bear. It don't seem like it can be true."

"It's true, all right. I ain't sayin' it ain't hard for you, too," said Mrs. Slocum, "but jest put yourself in *my* place! I got to have it morning, noon, and night! They's a letter tucked away in some new place every night, so's to surprise her in the mornin'; then after breakfast he comes in for a spell, and that sets the

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work back. Then in the evenin' they goes ridin', ef he can borrow a buggy; and every blessed night he sets up in my parlor, right on that lavender-plush patent rocker I bought from Miss Lucy White's auction. It ain't the wear an' tear I mind so much, either. It's bein' woke out of my first sleep with her a-creakin' up stairs. Land, I been thankin' my Maker for years I didn't have any child'en, and could escape the courtin' stage; and now here I got to go through with it from my own sister."

"And her a Higgins," said Mrs. Aaron, from her pillow. "Well, Sissy, they ain't but one thing to do, and that is to get her married and off *your* hands and on to the minister's as soon as possible."

"D'you suppose I ain't tried to?" asked Mrs. Slocum, with an injured air. "That was the very first thing I thought

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of, and I told her so. But she says — ‘Oh, Sissy, dear Charles is so bashful,’ and that’s all the good it done. Dear Charles is still a-comin’ to the point far’s I know. Land knows, he gets enough encouragement.”

“Bashful!” snorted Mrs. Posey. “Ef I was a man, which I thank my stars I ain’t, I’d up and ask him his intentions, that’s what I’d do. But I reckon a lady cain’t very well do that. Bashful! I sh’d think he’d oughter be, with them spindly legs. And her a Higgins!”

XVIII

The dry air of early September is good for rheumatism, and on the first day that Mrs. Aaron was able to get out into the sitting-room Mr. Willy Posey came to see her, brimming with news.

“Why, good evenin’, Cousin Annie Lee,” he exclaimed, with pleasant emphasis. “I certainly am mighty glad to see you. Seems like more’n a year sence you been sick!”

Mrs. Posey looked pleased. “Yes, it cert’n’y does to me,” she said. “How’s your own health, Cousin Willy?”

“Real tol’able, thank you, ma’am. I ain’t so much as had a cold, drivin’ around in all that wet spell. Yes ’m, things been

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real sprightly in Pocahontas here lately, Cousin Annie Lee."

"That so?" asked Mrs. Aaron, in comfortable anticipation.

"Yes 'm," said Mr. Willy. "I reckon you heard about the tournament?"

"No, I have n't," said Mrs. Aaron. "Not a word. Mr. Posey's been off electionin' every blessed day. When men gets started off on politics, they ain't room in their minds for anything else; and Sissy's been right here with me. I sh'd like to know how I'm to know what's goin' on!" Mrs. Posey was evidently voicing an old injury.

Mr. Willy moved his rocker close to hers. "Well 'm," he said, "politics has been right lively around here lately. They're beginnin' real early this year. I suppose you heard who's up for Democratic candidate?"

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"I ain't heard a thing," said Mrs. Aaron.

"Did n't they tell you about the plasterin' of the church a-fallin' down last Wednesday night right after Endeavor meetin', and it might 'a' killed somebody?"

Mrs. Aaron drew a deep breath, and set her lips. She was not going to admit again that she had heard none of the neighborhood news, but she was determined visibly if not audibly to express her sense of injury.

Mr. Willy's face and voice were full of sympathy. "Well, I declare," he said. "I would n't 'a' thought it of 'em. How 'd they expect a body to get up outen a bed of sickness without nothin' to take up their minds? I certainly don't think that 's the right way to treat you, Cousin Annie Lee! I certainly don't."

Mrs. Aaron stirred. "Well," she

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snapped, "I don't see 's you 're a-doin' much better yourself!"

"Oh!" Mr. Willy exclaimed and jumped. "Yes 'm. I was startin' to tell you about the tournament, was n't I? But you said you did n't know who 's up for Democratic candidate." Mrs. Posey jerked her head, and Mr. Willy went on, feeling his way. "Well 'm, they did n't seem like they 's very many hereabouts with much time to spare, and at the same time with a takin' way with 'em; and of course *you* know, Cousin Annie Lee, thet ef they 's one thing in politics more valuable then any other, it is havin' a takin' way! Now ain't that so?"

Mrs. Aaron looked at him piercingly; there was no need for her to ask.

"Yes 'm," said Mr. Willy. "I reckon you guessed it. It 's Zebedee V.!"

"My land! You 'd think that man was

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the Lord's anointed, the way the other men keeps on a-settin' their faith in him!" said Mrs. Aaron.

"Yes 'm," Mr. Willy went on, "he's up for it, and I reckon it's a-goin' to be a right lively campaign. They's been bonfires already, and I never knew 'em to begin *them* so quick. Mr. Harrison Cleggit from over yonder by Joppa's up against him, and last week he hired an excursion boat and give a steamboat ride down the Susquehanna to Betterton. It was a real pleasant occasion, I been told; but comin' home the boat run her nose on to them duckin' grounds, and time they got home for breakfast next mornin' Mr. Harrison Cleggit's constituents was right mad, some of 'em. Yes 'm. Of course we all — er — ah — I — I mean them that's managin' the campaign for Zebedee V. — has got to get up somethin' hereabouts to beat

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that excursion. Zebedee V. he stood up in the store the other night an' made a speech, and said as how he was always the one to feel for all needy obje'ts, and he wished to express his desire that whatever was give for him had oughter be give for some worthy charity likewise. Yes 'm. He certainly did speak real noble."

Mrs. Aaron thought for a moment, and then said, "Land! that ain't jest common sense! It's slyness, that's what it is. I sh'd think anybody could see through that! It's Zebedee V. Slocum's slyness!"

Few see into the heart of things as does Mrs. Aaron Posey; Mr. Willy missed the point and stared, but after a moment continued his narrative.

"Well 'm, the upshot of it was thet it was decided then and there to give a tournament for the benefit of the plasterin',

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so 's Zebedee V. could present the prizes and thereby have a chanct to make a speech. Yes 'm."

"There! What 'd I tell you?" said Mrs. Aaron. "It's fame and notoriety he's after, not charity for others. When they goin' to have the tournament?"

"Next Saturday evenin' at three o'clock," said Mr. Willy. "They got the arches up now. They's to be three of 'em, about twenty feet apart, with three rings a-hangin' down from each one. They got the platform for the ladies up near the church steps, and they goin' to use that wide space in front for the listin' ground. Everybody thet rides has the right to place his chosen lady on the stand, and the knight thet gets the whole nine o' the rings on his lance has the right to crown the queen o' love and beauty. Him thet comes second chooses the first maid

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of honor, and him thet comes along after the second chooses the other one. And they's to be a purse for the winner — maybe as much as four dollars. Yes'm. I reckon it'll be a real bright occasion."

"Why, yes," said Mrs. Posey; she was smiling as one smiles at old sweet dreams. "We all ain't had a tournament hereabouts for goodness knows how long. First time I ever took to Mr. Posey was at a tournament. Land! I wonder how he'd look now with a long ostrich plume in the side of his hat, and a Roman sash tied acrost him!"

"The costumes is goin' to be real nice this time, I been told. Mr. Frank Slocum goes as the Knight of St. Mary's Hill, and he's a-goin' to wear white feathers in his hat and white rosettes pinned on him. Mr. Moses Cary's goin' as the Knight of Rosemead, and he's got

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a great big bunch o' pink and red roses for the front of his hat, and another bunch to wear on his breast, and yet another for between his horse's ears. Little Hanse Brown's goin' as the Knight O' June's Delight, and he's got a whole bunch of ostrich plumes for his hat; he's goin' to borrow his ma's garden hat, and wear it turned up on the side with the feathers attached. He's got a yeller swaller-tail coat he used in some tableaux whilst he's at the Agricultcheal College. I reckon Little Hanse'll take the shine offen most everybody else. Yes 'm."

"You goin' to tilt?" asked Mrs. Aaron, all benevolence.

"Who? Me? No, ma'am," replied Mr. Willy. "I don't believe in encouragin' the ladies, myself; and besides, I lent Alexander to Zebedee V. I told him she's right smart of a horse to manage,

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and I would n't be held responsible for any damage she done to him, but he's welcome to ride her, for the good o' the cause, ef his winnin' the tournament would help him into th' Assembly. Yes 'm. I ain't never gone back on the Democratic party yet, and I ain't never goin' to. So I lent him Alexander."

When the day of the tournament came, Mrs. Posey insisted that she was well enough to sit alone, and that Mr. Posey should take Sissy to see the tilting of the knights. The ladies had talked it over before, and it seemed well to both of them that some responsible and sensible member of the family should be on hand "to watch out thet Julia behaves herself." Mrs. Aaron's parting injunctions to her sister had been:

"And ef Julia drives up with the min-

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ister, you call her over like you wanted to fix her placket, and don't you let go of her again."

The day was as hot as only early September can be; there had been no rain for weeks, and although she had heard that the managers of the tournament were to sprinkle the road and listing ground with the minister's watering can, Mrs. Posey watched the dust raised by her husband's departing Dayton with a thought of thanking her stars that she was n't called on to ride in that tournament. She spent the afternoon picturing it in her imagination, however, and in thinking about the tournaments of bygone days. It was towards six o'clock when she heard the returning wheels, and looked expectantly towards the door. To her surprise and consternation it was opened not by Mr. Aaron but by Mr. Willy Posey, who half

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led, half carried, and wholly steered the weeping Mrs. Slocum.

Mrs. Aaron tried to rise from her chair, and turned pale. "Land o' Goshen!" she exclaimed. "What's the matter? Don't tell me Mr. Posey's broke his leg!"

Mrs. Slocum moved her head negatively, and Mr. Willy said reassuringly — "No, indeedy, they ain't one thing the matter. Miss Sissy's jest overcome. Don't you worry, Cousin Annie Lee. Cousin Aaron had to stay to talk about some election details. They ain't anything the matter with *him*!"

He helped Mrs. Slocum to his own favorite rocker, and brought her a glass of water from the kitchen. Mrs. Aaron watched them with anxiety until Mrs. Slocum mopped her eyes and began to untie her bonnet. Mr. Willy still hovered over her.

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“When you come to entirely,” suggested Mrs. Aaron, “maybe you ’ll tell me what all this fuss is about.”

Mr. Willy smiled, and brought a straight chair from against the wall. Mrs. Slocum was sniffing occasionally, but it was evident that the business of rolling her bonnet strings was putting her troubles out of her mind.

“Well, Cousin Annie Lee,” Mr. Willy said at last, cheerfully smiling, “it passed all expectations! Yes ’m! It certainly did!”

“Hum,” sniffed Mrs. Posey. Mrs. Slocum drew down the corners of her mouth and mopped her eyes.

“It was grand,” said Mr. Willy. “It certainly was grand. Cousin Aaron and Mis’ Slocum drove up jest as the knights was linin’ up, so they had to set in the buggy tell it was all over. That ’s how

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come Miss Sissy feels so bad — not bein' right on hand when it happened."

"*What* happened?" demanded Mrs. Aaron sharply; she was almost beyond further endurance.

"Well 'm, I tell you how it was," said Mr. Willy. "It was a mighty good tournament. They was seven knights in line, and they all had feathers and sashes real proper, and their poles was painted the same color of their sashes, too. They certainly did look elegant. Elegant."

"Of course they had to ride at a certain rate of speed; and I must say I's real proud of Alexander, ef she is my mare. Zebedee V. he told me beforehan', he says, 'Say, Willy, d' you suppose I can stay on at that rate of speed?' I says, 'Laws, yes, Z. V. Alexander's fast, but she's kind; and all you got to do is to give

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her her head,' I says. He says, 'I'm willin' to give her her head, ef she 'll leave me mine. Politics is right costly, ain't it?' But when the time come, you 'd think Alexander was born an' brought up on tournaments. They was n't ary one o' the other horses could touch her. You could see thet white tail o' hers a-standin' out like the tail of a comet, she 's goin' so fast. Zebedee V. jest could n't help catchin' them nine rings, riding Alexander; and they was n't ary one o' the other knights took more 'n seven.

"Well, ma'am, I jest tell you, enthusiasm riz to quite a pitch when Alexander and Zebedee V. rode up to the ladies' stand with the wreath o' dahlias on the end of his spear. Yes 'm. Zebedee V. took off his hat — he had on that long purple plume his second wife wore in her weddin' bonnet, and it looked real nice in his big wide



“You’d think Alexander was born an’ brought up
on tournaments”

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hat; and he wheeled Alexander around and made a speech. Yes 'm."

"Of course he did," said Mrs. Aaron. "Trust him to make a speech. That's him all over again."

"Yes 'm," said Mr. Willy. "Well, I can't jest remember every word he said, notwithstandin' the impression it made on my mind; but he said he's more 'n glad to be able to welcome the youth and beauty of our fair country to sech a festive occasion. He said it was n't more 'n right and proper that they should emulate the acts of the chivalric knights of long ago, sence all the chivalry of the days long past was n't by no means dead, as he meant to prove. Said it give him most pleasure of all to meet and mingle with the fair maidens and dames without whose presence the best decorated place would be but a barren waste, and any

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tourney a dismal failure. Said he knew he'd be allowed to say that they was no finer sight to be had then the sight of sech feats of horsemanship and skill as had been exhibited this evenin', and that it was a long sight better 'n goin' off on a crowded steamboat and gettin' stuck in a mud bank.

“Said he was n't there, however, to point to the failures of others, but to the success of the present tournament, and that it was his held-fast opinion thet they could n't be any real success in life without a flavorin' of love, both in gen'ral and in partic'lar. Said they was all aware thet this tournament was held for the sole and only purpose of raisin' the money to plaster the church anew; and therefore it give him real and genuwine pleasure to present for that purpose the purse that he was entitled to as winner. Yes 'm.”

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“Hum,” said Mrs. Aaron, “seems to me it was a long sight better to give it to the plasterin’ then to politics.”

“Well, he give it,” said Mr. Willy, and continued. “Then he called to me to help him down offen Alexander, which I did. Then Zebedee V. took up the wreath o’ dahlias, and mounted to the platform where the ladies set. He said to the assembled company, when they got done cheerin’, that he hoped they’d all bear with him whilst he still further expressed his views. Said he always was ready and willin’ to help them thet needed help, and that he had one friend among the company who seemed to need assistance about as bad as any he’d ever known. Said it was jest in the line where he felt hi’self most expert, too, havin’ had a rich and varied experience therein. Said that kind of business was generally attended to by

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the little god Cupid, but he's as willin' to lend Cupid a helpin' hand as he was to lend courage to the minister.

"Thereupon, Cousin Annie Lee, he turned around with a bow and presented the wreath to Miss Julia Higgins, and said, says he, 'Allow me, fair lady, to crown you Queen of Love and Beauty, in the name of our respected and looked-up-to minister, the Reverend Mr. Charles Bean!'

"And then he turned around again, and before anybody could recover, he called out 'Ef the minister from Joppa, the Reverend Gorsich, will step forwards, we'll have the weddin' here and now.' Which they did. Yes 'm."

Mrs. Slocum was holding her handkerchief to her eyes, and for once in her life Mrs. Aaron was too surprised to have anything to say. Mr. Willy enjoyed the

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situation for a few minutes, and then said,

“Yes ’m. We’s all right smart surprised. We certainly were. Zebedee V. told me afterwards he reckoned he’d brought down the bird, so to speak, o’ the votes o’ the county, ’cause it was n’t likely that the other candidates could work up a reputation for helpin’ along matrimony that a way. Yes ’m.”

Mrs. Slocum sniffed audibly. Mrs. Aaron Posey looked at her, and said sternly:

“For goodness sake, Sissy, do have some sense. It ain’t a disgrace to have a minister in the family.”

XIX

“It was a very pleasant affair indeed,” said Mrs. Aaron Posey to her sister, Mrs. Slocum, a month or so after the famous tournament. “Flora might be expected to do things right.”

“Yes,” assented Mrs. Slocum, “it was most pleasant. I noticed the jelly-cake was made after Mis’ Frank Cary’s receipt. Mis’ Frank Cary did n’t seem very well pleased, for anybody could see that Flora beat her on her own cake.”

“So she did,” said Mrs. Posey. “The fried chicken, though, was queer, to say the least of it. I never saw chicken cut up that way before; its own grandmother would n’t ’a’ recognized it. That ’s where

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bein' a Westerner shows, in things like that. I should n't wonder if the sister cut it up."

"Yes, I took note of it," admitted Mrs. Slocum. "It tasted about as good, though, I reckon. D'you suppose she uses half-and-half for her ice cream?"

"Um-m-m," said Mrs. Posey, "no tellin'. Flora knows how to manage. The sister don't look so smart. Queer thing how one person in a family generally gets most all the sense."

Mrs. Sissy drew in her chin and said nothing, but Mrs. Aaron went on unconcernedly. "That mat embroidered in strawberries and wild roses was real pretty — the one on the dining-room table. I reckon the sister runs to art more 'n to housekeepin'. She don't resemble Flora very much, for a twin."

"What do you suppose made 'em call

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it a tea?" asked Mrs. Slocum. "Lemonade was all I got, and Miss Wilkins called that fruit punch. I wish you could 'a' seen the minister when she asked him to have some. He got as red as a turkey-cock, and then when he saw what it really was, he had a dreadful time tryin' to get a hold of some without Miss Wilkins noticin'."

"Pore young man," said Mrs. Posey, "he's got a lot to learn, ef he is my brother-in-law and Julia's own husband."

The ladies were discussing the party given the evening before by Mrs. Zebedee V. Slocum for her sister, who had come from the West on a visit, and in honor of the minister and his bride.

"I don't think I ever saw puffs like hers before. I was in fear and tremblin' the whole evenin' lessen they should fall off. It stands to reason they did n't grow

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on her head. If that's Western style I thank my stars I was born in Pocahontas."

"The gentlemen seemed to take to her right smart," suggested Mrs. Slocum.

"Oh," said Mrs. Aaron, "there ain't a man made but what'll run after a new face, exceptin' them that's held well in hand by some woman with common sense."

"I don't think there's much in Alameda Wilkins's face to attract the eye of anybody," said Mrs. Slocum.

"Land," said Mrs. Aaron, "you cain't tell by that. D'you ever see a good-lookin' man with a pretty wife, or a handsome woman with a handsome husband? Never! It don't go that a way. Look at Mr. Posey. As I often tell him, they never *was* a good-lookin' Posey."

"Then accordin' to that," suggested

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Mrs. Slocum, "Mr. Willy Posey oughten to take to Alameda Wilkins."

"He did n't," said Mrs. Posey, positively. "She took to him. That ain't the same thing. A woman'll take to most any kind of a man, especially when she gets to the age where it's hopin' against hope."

"Well," said Mrs. Slocum, "I don't call it genteel to set up to anybody like she did to Mr. Willy Posey. I saw her take him two plates of ice cream with her own hands, and she asked him right before everybody what he did with the wish-bone of his chicken."

"It was n't his fault," asserted Mrs. Aaron. "Cousin Willy is a man, I'll admit; but he's got a little more common sense than most. It was Zebedee V. Slocum that done it."

"No, he did n't either," declared Mrs.

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Slocum, with some spirit. "I saw her hand it to him with my own eyes."

"For the land's sake, Sissy, do have some sense," exclaimed Mrs. Aaron impatiently. "Can't you listen to what a body says? I tell you, it was Zebedee V. Slocum that threw 'em together. You mark my words, that man's got some scheme on hand."

Mrs. Aaron was not greatly mistaken, although for a week or so she did not have the satisfaction of certainty. The next afternoon, when Mr. Willy came with the mail, he was looking unusually rosy and bright, and his smile was more fixed than ever.

"Why, good evenin', Cousin Annie Lee," he chirped. "Have a nice time at the tea?"

Mrs. Posey looked at him over her

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glasses; he was standing awkwardly near the door, his favorite rocker apparently not tempting him. He had the manner of one prepared for immediate flight.

"Yes, real nice," said Mrs. Aaron. "Thank you for askin'. You did n't seem much concerned over anybody's good time while you was there but Alameda Wilkinses."

Mr. Willy blushed and smiled. "Well 'm, I thought it was n't more 'n polite to show some attention to the lady the party was give for," he said. "Yes 'm."

"Well, you showed it," said Mrs. Aaron. "You showed it plain. Why did n't you show some to the minister or Julia?"

Mr. Willy giggled. "Reckon I better be goin'," he said, and fled.

The next time he appeared, Mr. Willy

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opened the door of the sitting-room and handed in the newspaper. He seemed about to do the same thing on the following day, but Mrs. Aaron was never caught unprepared a second time. She held the door firmly open, determination in the grip of her hand, suspicion in her eye, and displeasure in the set of her lips.

“What’s your hurry?” she asked.

“Ma’am?” queried Mr. Willy.

“I said what’s your hurry,” Mrs. Posey repeated. “Your hearin’ gettin’ bad again?”

“Ain’t any hurry,” said Mr. Willy. “I jest thought I would n’t stop this evenin’.”

“What you got the curtains of your Dayton down for?” Mrs. Aaron demanded.

Mr. Willy closed one eye and looked up at the cloudless sky. “Well ’m, I thought

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it looked kinder sprinkly when I started. Yes 'm."

"Hum," said Mrs. Aaron, and shut the door with a bang.

The next afternoon she came around the corner of the house, quite accidentally, as Mr. Willy drove up, so that she unavoidably faced the Dayton and the two people in it. Mr. Willy hopped out at once, and began to busy himself with the straps that passed under the horse. The lady, however, smiled and bowed.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Posey," she said. "How do you do?"

"My health's as usual, thank you," said Mrs. Aaron. "Won't you come in while Cousin Willy mends his harness?"

Mr. Willy straightened himself; he was very red. "It was jest twisted," he said. "Reckon we better not stop this evenin'."

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They drove off, and Mrs. Posey, with set lips, looked after the retreating wagon. As she went into the house she said to herself, "I suppose they're bound to get took sooner or later. No more'n you can expect of a man."

Mr. Willy knew that it would be unwise to allow many days to pass without making his usual afternoon call on Mrs. Aaron, and a day or two afterwards he came in with his most youthful manner, but with a smile that was, perhaps, a little forced.

"Why, good evenin', Cousin Annie Lee," he exclaimed, as if he had not expected to see her. "Seems like quite a while since I saw you."

Had Mr. Willy been less perturbed he would not have made such a remark; Mrs. Aaron took immediate advantage of it.

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"Well, whose fault's that, please tell me? I been here steady. Them that wants to see me knows where to find me."

"Yes 'm," said Mr. Willy, "yes 'm. I reckon it's been me. I been mighty occupied here lately."

"Hum," said Mrs. Aaron, "I hope you enjoyed it."

"Ma'am?"

"I said I hope you enjoyed it. You know what I'm talking about as well as I do. They ain't any use makin' believe you don't."

"Well 'm," said Mr. Willy boldly, "you oughter know's well's anybody else, Cousin Annie Lee, thet I enjoy the company of the ladies, and always did."

"It seems to be growin' on you," said Mrs. Posey. "I always say they's no fool like an old fool, and I suppose you won't deny you're comin' on in years."

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“It’s the heart that keeps a man young,” said Mr. Willy, with dignity. “A man ain’t any older ’n he feels.”

“That so?” asked Mrs. Aaron. “I suppose you think of engagin’ Miss Alameda Wilkins to wheel you aroun’ in a go-cart!”

“No, ma’am,” said Mr. Willy, his face flushing. “Miss Wilkins prefers my Dayton. Good evenin’; I gotter be goin’.”

XX

Mrs. Aaron was in quite a state of mind. Seldom had she been so thoroughly amused, and at the same time deeply exasperated. It was disconcerting, to say the least, that Cousin Willy, whose allegiance had been a matter of years, should fall in love at his time of life, and fall in love so foolishly. But of course she blamed it all upon Zebedee V.

After all, nothing better could be expected of Mr. Willy in the face of such temptation; but Zebedee V. had had experience enough for anything, and of course he was urging Willy into it, into — so she indignantly told herself — his very undoing. She considered Zebedee V. even more to blame than the temptress

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herself; for when a woman reaches the age of Flora's sister, no other woman could blame her for wanting to settle in life; indeed, Mrs. Aaron thought that admirable common sense on Alameda's part.

She was too loyal to her most confidential friend to discuss the state of his heart with anyone; even Mr. Posey was severely snubbed whenever he broached the subject. Sometimes, when Mr. Aaron came back from the store all smiles and subdued chuckles, it was almost more than she could do not to ask him all about it; but pride and loyalty, and perhaps something else, restrained her. Mr. Posey did not mind the snubbing; he perfectly well knew how much her silence cost her.

Yet somehow rumors reached her of Zebedee V.'s great interest in the course

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of true love, and even some of his remarks upon it came back to her. Flora brought Miss Wilkins out to the farm to call, and Mrs. Aaron was most polite; Zora came to spend the day, all dimples and smiles at the absurdity of Aunt Allie and Uncle Willy taking to each other that way; but Mrs. Aaron would not be drawn into questions or expressions of her own opinion. Mr. Willy took to leaving the mail at the front door, or handing it to his cousin Aaron at the barn; a week or two passed without Mrs. Posey's having had any conversation with him.

Then, one dreary, drizzling afternoon, when she thought it too late for the mail, and was saying to herself that "Mr. Posey" would "ketch his death o' cold, bein' out this late in the wet," she heard a timid, faltering step on her side porch.

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Holding her darning in her apron, she went to open the door, and was amazed to behold Mr. Willy standing there, looking as dejected as his round, rosy face would permit.

“For the land’s sake,” she exclaimed, “what’s the matter? What’s the matter? Don’t tell me it’s Mr. Posey?”

Mr. Willy shifted his weight from one foot to the other. Mrs. Aaron grabbed his arm, her darning gourd and several rolls of stockings falling to the floor unnoticed.

“If it’s Mr. Posey, I want to know the worst at once,” she said. “Don’t stand there gairpin’!”

Mr. Willy shook his head. “No, ma’am,” he said, feebly. “I jest saw Cousin Aaron out to the barn. It ain’t him. It — it’s me.”

Mrs. Aaron glared at Mr. Willy for a

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full minute, and if looks could petrify, poor Mr. Willy would have become a statue of woe on the instant. Then she turned and stalked into the room, and Mr. Willy followed her, picking up the gourd from where it had rolled under the table. He stood in front of her with timidly drooping shoulders.

“Set down,” snapped Mrs. Aaron. “What’s come over you?”

Mr. Willy sighed audibly, and drew up a small straight chair, it was evident that he was in no mood to-day for the comfort of a rocker.

“You got malaria?” asked Mrs. Aaron, heartlessly.

Mr. Willy sadly shook his head, and sighed again. “No, ma’am,” he said, humbly.

Mrs. Aaron peered at him over her glasses. “Well,” she said, “you look to

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me like you 're comin' down with some-thin'. Does your head ache? "

Again Mr. Willy replied, dejectedly, "No, ma'am."

"Oh," said Mrs. Aaron, as if the idea had just come to her, "I forgot. You been gettin' young again! Maybe it's measles!"

Poor Mr. Willy drooped still more, rubbed his hands over one another, and gazed out at the cheerless drizzle. "I — I got a right smart on my mind," he said.

"Thinkin' about the cares of a family?" asked Mrs. Aaron, pitilessly.

He could not reply at once; then, with an evident effort, he edged his chair nearer to hers, and asked in a low, trembling voice:

"Cousin Annie Lee, how much is bindin'?"

Mrs. Aaron Posey looked surprised.

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“ Bindin’? ” she repeated. “ What kind o’ bindin’? ”

Mr. Willy blushed deeply. “ No, ma’am; that ain’t what I mean. I mean, how much does it take to make a man bound? I mean — well — yes ’m.”

Mrs. Aaron still looked bewildered. “ Bound to what? What on earth you drivin’ at? ”

Mr. Willy swallowed several times, and blinked as if tears were imminent. “ Well,” he said at last, “ I ’ll tell you how it is, Cousin Annie Lee. It’s this a way. You know very well I always have friendly feelin’s towards all and malice towards none; but sometimes it certainly does seem like that ought to be turned around the other way. Yes ’m. You know very well, and I don’t care ef it ain’t my place to say it, that I been known all my life as ready and willin’ to have a

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pleasant time, and to give a pleasant time to others. Yes 'm. I have so. And Zebedee V. Slocum, he knows that as well as any, and has good and sufficient reason to. Yes, ma'am, that he has. And, moreover, it's always been my disposition to trust them's I think my friends. And Zebedee V., he knows that, too; and I never would 'a' been the one to think he'd presume on it. No, ma'am, that I would n't."

Mr. Willy paused; it was evident that his feelings were almost too much for him. Mrs. Aaron went on with her darning, and most unsympathetically remarked:

"I've understood you to say that only the women are ever down on Zebedee V. Slocum, and that *you* never could see why!"

"Yes 'm," admitted Mr. Willy. His

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spirit seemed utterly crushed; a retort was beyond him. "I did so. I did so. Eh me!"

Mrs. Aaron was mollified. She said kindly, "Well, Cousin Willy, I do hope you ain't lent him any money."

"No 'm," said Mr. Willy. "I wish I had. Money would be cheap at any price, compared with this present trouble."

"For goodness sake say what you got to say," exclaimed Mrs. Aaron. "Seems like you're bound to scare a body to death."

"Well 'm, the beginnin' of it was this. I was drivin' along towards his house with the mail one day, and when I got most there, Zebedee V. come outen the bushes alongside the road, and he says, 'Say, Willy, you got any letters for — up there?' He pointed with his thumb back towards his house, and I knew he must

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mean Flora. I says 'Yes, they's one letter from her old home out West — Plum-tree, Indiana.'

"I had n't scarcely gotten the words outen my mouth, when Zebedee V. he says, 'Oh, Lord!' and sets himself down on the side of the road, lookin' like all the life been took outen him. I say, 'Laws, Z. V., what's the matter? It ain't anybody dead, is it?' He shook his head real sad like, and he says, 'No, not dead. Livin'.' I says, 'Well, whilst they's life they's hope, Z. V.,' and he says, 'No, they ain't, not in this case. You don't know. I reckon nothin' but a cyclone or a sun-stroke would keep one of that family from doin' what they sets their minds on; and she's comin.' I says, 'Who's a-comin'?' and he says, 'Her sister. Flora's sister. And the good Lord knows what I'm a-goin' to do with two of 'em in the

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house.' Yes 'm. I certainly did feel real sorrerful for Zebedee V. I don't know how 's ever I did see a man as crushed as that before. Yes 'm."

Mrs. Aaron said, severely, "That 's a nice way to talk about your wife's relations, ain't it? "

Mr. Willy jumped at the suddenness of the imputation, and said hurriedly, "Laws, Cousin Annie Lee, I ain't got any wife and I don't *want* any wife. I never did take to matrimony. Ef Zebedee V. had n't 'a' got married, he would 'a' been a freer and a happier man, too, pore soul. I jest tell you what it is, I certainly did feel for him that day. Yes 'm. I thought I jest had to say somethin' to comfort him, and I says, 'Laws, Z. V., maybe she ain't the same kind,' I says. But Zebedee V. shook his head. 'I know the kind,' he says. 'I know it well. And ef she once gets here,

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she 'll stay. And the Lord knows how I 'm a-goin' to bear it.'

"Well 'm, I did n't see any more of him tell after she got here, and then one night he come down to the store, and he called me out, real confidential, lookin' right bright and happy. 'Say, Willy,' he says, 'come on up to my house. I want to make you acquainted with my sister-in-law.' I says, 'I reckon I cain't go up to-night, Z. V.,' but he says, 'Oh, yes, you can; you look all right.' You know Zebedee V. certainly has real persuadin' ways with him; and first thing I knew, there I was. Miss Alameda 's a-settin' up in the parlor like she expected company, and I thought soon 's the company come I could make my excuses and depart. But she certainly is real entertainin', Miss Alameda is; it was long past eleven o'clock when I got home.

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“The next time I saw any of ’em was at the tea, and Zebedee V. says to me, ‘My sister-in-law’s been wonderin’ what’s become of you, Willy; I wisht you’d pay her some little attention whilst she’s here. You’ve had experience enough with the fair sex to know that a little attention goes a long way towards cheerin’ ’em up; and the more cheerin’ they gets, Willy, the more easy it is to get along with ’em. I wisht you’d jest show her some little attention for my sake.’ He looked like a man thet has a good deal to bear, so I went over and talked to her some.”

“I should think you did,” remarked Mrs. Aaron.

“Yes ’m. I did. I did n’t mean nothin’ by so doin’; but as I was a-comin’ away, she took a holt of my hand real soft, and says, ‘Oh, it’s sweet to find yourself in sympathy with a noble soul’;

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and I must say I felt real — real — oh, I dunno!

“ I thought I might ’s well invite her to go drivin’ with me the next day, which I did; and the day after that she ’s a-waitin’ with her hat on when I got to Zebedee V.’s house, and she says, ‘ I know you ’ll be lonesome ef I don’t come to-day too!’ And I must say, it certainly was real pleasant like to have a fair companion on your daily rounds of duty; she ’s real interested, too, in my house, and what I do, and all that. It certainly was real pleasant. Real pleasant.”

“ With the curtains down!” said Mrs. Aaron. Mr. Willy blushed again, and hastily continued his story.

“ One day she says to me, she says, ‘ I suppose them that ’s younger ’n us goes out to ride by moonlight, sometimes ’; and I says, ‘ Yes, miss, them as young as you

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do. Maybe you 'd like to take a ride in the moonlight to-night? ' I says."

"With — the — curtains — down!" repeated Mrs. Aaron.

"Yes 'm," said Mr. Willy, choking, quivering, tearful. "That 's jest what Zebedee V. says. He come up to me in the store yesterday mornin', right while everybody 's there, and he give me a thump betwixt the shoulder-blades, and he says, 'Good for you, Willy! I never would 'a' thought it of you! You 're sly, ain't you? Good for you! Haw haw!' And everybody up and ast him what 's the matter, and he said I 'd been out drivin' by moonlight with his sister-in-law, *with the curtains down*, and that she come home — with — one — side — of her — face as red as red."

Mrs. Aaron looked at him piercingly over her glasses. "Willy Posey," she

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asked, with great severity, “do you mean to tell me that at your time of life you made such a fool of yourself as to —”

Mr. Willy interrupted her. “No, ma’am. No, ma’am, I did n’t. That ’s jest what I told ’em at the store, but they jest shouted. That ’s what they did. I never did feel so mortified in all my born days. And Zebedee V. was the worst o’ the lot. I never ’s so deceived in a friend before. He says, ‘Oh, that ’s all right, Willy, that ’s all right. You got to say that on the lady’s account. But I reckon they ain’t ary man here but what ’ll give you credit enough to believe that you did n’t take a lady out on a moonlight drive without ’ — Oh-h-h!” groaned Mr. Willy, and buried his head in his hands.

Mrs. Aaron smiled grimly, and bit her lip. “It ’s plain to be seen what that man ’s up to,” she said, after a while.

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“Yes ’m,” cried Mr. Willy. “Yes ’m. It is.”

“It ’s one of his schemes, that ’s what it is,” declared Mrs. Aaron. Mr. Willy drew out his handkerchief and held it to his eyes.

“How much is bindin’, Cousin Annie Lee?” he once more besought her.

“Land,” said Mrs. Aaron, “that much ain’t. Where ’s your spunk? Go to Zeb-dee V. Slocum and tell him right up and down that you would n’t marry that woman if she ’s made of gold and precious stones, which she ain’t; and jest make him understand you say you won’t, and you won’t.”

Mr. Willy groaned. Mrs. Posey continued: “It ain’t like you ’s a marryin’ man. Everybody hereabouts knows you never had any intention towards any woman ’t ever lived, and that you ’re too old to begin at this time o’ life.”

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Mr. Willy gulped. "Yes 'm, I was fifty-four last Decoration Day. I'm comin' on!" It was a pitiful admission.

"Well, jest keep your backbone in you, and tell him you won't. That's all you can do, and ef you do it right it'll be enough. Show some common sense about it!"

XXI

Mrs. Posey often smiled as she went about her work during the next few days; but as the afternoons passed and she saw nothing of the postman she began to grow anxious. One day towards the end of the week, however, Mr. Willy opened the sitting-room door and walked in, wearing his rosiest smile and jauntiest air. He had a blossom in his buttonhole.

“Why, good evenin’, Cousin Annie Lee,” he said, in his old cheery way.

“I been wonderin’ about you,” said Mrs. Aaron Posey cordially, and smiled. “Take a rocker, won’t you?”

“Yes ’m, thank you ma’am,” said Mr. Willy. “I wanted to stop by yesterday,

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but I had to be in attendance on Zebedee V.”

Mrs. Aaron frowned. Mr. Willy said quickly, “That little matter I was askin’ you about the other day’s all right. Yes ’m. Miss Alameda Wilkins has gone back out West.”

“You don’t say!” Mrs. Posey exclaimed.

“Yes ’m. I must say, I feel real bad when I remember what I said about bein’ deceived in Zebedee V. They never was a truer friend. No, ma’am. I went to him like you advised. At first he jest laughed; but when I finally got him to see that I was in dead earnest and jest would n’t — would n’t — er — marry the lady, he says, ‘Well,’ he says, ‘they’s jest this about it, Willy. I can’t have her in my house. I stood the poll-parrot, and I stood work; I stood givin’ up smokin’, and

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I stood givin' up goin' to the store; I stood wearin' shirts she made that's too tight in the collar, and I stood bein' put to bed and fed on slops every time I got a crick in my neck. I even stood her takin' all my good money away from me. I stood all that, but I be — ' ' Mr. Willy coughed. " Yes 'm. I don't like to repeat jest all he said. But he said it real strong and to the point. He said he could stand one Flora, she bein' his own wedded wife; but he could n't and would n't stand two of her. He said, ' You come along into the house with me, Willy. I jest need the sight of you to make me remember that a man has his rights, howsoever he may feel towards them that's his own to perfect and govern.' He says, ' I 'm the head of this family, and I reckon I 've let my lovin' forbearance go jest about far enough.' Yes 'm. That's what he said."



“Zebedee V. stood in the middle o’ the floor with
his arms folded”

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“Well ’m, we went in the house together; and they was several things said. Some of the children set to cryin’; and Flora, she — oh well, I never was one to go around repeatin’ things as oughter be kept in families, Cousin Annie Lee. Anyways, Zebedee V. stood in the middle o’ the floor with his arms folded on his chest tell Miss Alameda Wilkins got her trunk packed, and then him and me drove her off to the station. She’s cryin’ all the way down, but Z. V. says he reckons she ’ll get her cry out before she reaches Indiana.”

Mrs. Aaron clucked; her expression was one of mingled satisfaction and disapproval. “Well,” she said, “I ain’t denyin’ it’s just as well that woman’s gone back out West; but I must say I do think Zebedee V. Slocum might ’a’ behaved a little mite kinder towards her. I

ZEBEDEE V

cain't imagine how Flora come to let him do so."

Mr. Willy chuckled and slapped his knee.

"Flora ain't the head of that family no more, I 'm tellin' ye! I reckon Z. V. 'll know how to keep Flora in place hereafter. And that ain't all!"

He paused. "What ain't?" Mrs. Aaron asked.

"Zora's married!"

Mrs. Aaron precipitately arose from her chair, and as abruptly sat down again. She gasped. "Zora!" she cried. "Zora married? What you talkin' about? Why Zora was up here only three — four days ago!"

"And yesterday she's married! Yes, ma'am, that she was. I'll tell you how it happened. It was this a way. When me and Z. V. was a-comin' from the sta-

ZEBEDEE V

tion seein' Miss Wilkins off, we met the doctor. I reckon Z. V. felt like tellin' most everybody what had happened, and the more the merrier. Anyways, we stopped to talk to the doctor; and when Doc' heard all about it, he jest laid his head back and roared.

“ ‘ Mr. Slocum,’ says he, ‘ you ’re the greatest man this side o’ Jordon,’ says he; and Z. V. looks real pleased, ’cause they ’d been right smart of coolness betwixt the doctor and the Slocumses, ever sence Mis’ Slocum put her foot down on Zora gettin’ married.

“ Then the doctor, he says, ‘ So you ’re the boss now, are ye? Well, Mr. Slocum, I ain’t denyin’ it ’s the man’s place to boss, and a good deal better for the women when they do; but if you ’ll pardon my sayin’ so — seein’ ’s believin’!’

“ At that Zebedee V. he says, ‘ Doc,

ZEBEDEE V

air you too busy this mornin' to drive past the minister's with me?'

"Doc, he got as red as red, and then he got real white around the gills. But he kinder squinted at Zebedee V. to see what he meant like, and says, 'No, sir, I ain't too busy to drive by the minister's with you!' And then he shet his mouth real tight and close, and we all drove off, our team in the lead, to the minister's. Z. V. got out and went inside; and pretty soon he come out and the minister was follerin' him and lookin' kinder scared. Then we drove the minister up to Zebedee V.'s house, and we all four went inside. The children see us comin', and Mis' Slocum and Zora; it was quite a gatherin'.

"Then Z. V., he stood up again with his arms folded on his chest, and he says,

" ' Doctor Pierson, I understand you 're wantin' to marry my daughter? ' "

ZEBEDEE V

“Doc, he says, ‘I most certainly do, sir.’

“Mis’ Slocum, she started to say something, but Z. V. jest waved at her, and she look like she’s too surprised to speak. Then he says, ‘Zebedora, my daughter, I understand you’re wantin’ to marry this doctor?’ And Zora, she jest gives a little sob like, and says, ‘Oh, Pa!’ The doctor, he holds out his arm to her, and Zora kinder slips into it and hides her face against him.

“Then Zebedee V. jest puffed out his chest real grand, and says to the minister, he says, ‘Sir, proceed!’ And the minister up and married Zora and the doctor right then and there.”

Mr. Willy paused, and Mrs. Aaron, who had two little red spots in her cheeks and whose eyes were unusually dim, asked:

“What did Flora do, Cousin Willy?”

ZEBEDEE V

Mr. Willy smiled, and began to rock. "Well 'm," he said, "When I come away the weddin' party had drove off, and the children was eatin' Mis' Slocum's best fruit cake in the parlor, and Flora was a-cryin' with her head on Zebedee V.'s shoulder. Z. V., he was smokin' one of the doctor's seegars, and pattin' Flora on the head. And he certainly did look real pleased like. Yes 'm."

"Well," said Mrs. Aaron, reluctantly, after a pause, "well, I reckon they's some good in everybody."

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